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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

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THE KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

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SWEDENBORG

JOHN HOWARD SPALDING

"The Kingdom of God
is a Kingdom of uses."
SWEDENBORG.

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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

INTRODUCTION

It is now some forty years since I began to study Swedenborg's theological works. Being naturally of a sceptical turn of mind, I had gradually discarded the evangelical theology in which I had been brought up; and, in early manhood, I found myself an unwilling and, now and then, a despairing Agnostic. The universe seemed to me like a vast machine, grinding along its resistless and remorseless way to no end, or to none that man could discern, or, discerning, could either retard or accelerate; he himself being but a tiny piece of that great mechanism, and helplessly carried along with it, while hugging to himself the illusion that he contributed to its movement.

The first serious shock to this conception came from reading two remarkable articles on Spiritualism, by the late Dr. A. R. Wallace, which were published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1874. I began to "investigate" Spiritualism—I am afraid, in the usual slipshod and inconclusive way; saw many curious and inexplicable things, but none more curious and inexplicable than many conjuring feats I had witnessed; heard others—and that on good authority and at first hand—still more curious and inexplicable. But in Spiritualism I found no resting-place. Except as to its one fundamental assertion of the existence of an unseen

world, the abode of men and women who had passed out of this world by death, it was a doctrinal chaos. It was Christian and anti-Christian, High Church, Broad Church, and no-Church. I found it was a road that led anywhere, and therefore nowhere to any purpose.

At this time I had a volume of Swedenborg's works, the *True Christian Religion*, on my shelves, the gift of a dear old friend, a life-long student of that author, but had never been able to read it. I had made several attempts, from a sense of obligation to the friend who gave it me, but a sentence or two had always been enough. I now made another attempt, and found to my surprise that I could read it with interest, though not by any means with acceptance of all or even the greater part of its teaching. The part of Swedenborg's teaching which most impressed me at this time was his doctrine of the human soul and of the future life. The soul *is* a spiritual body. It is the man himself. It is clothed with a material body during its first stage of existence, to enable it to live and act in a material world, fixed and stable, independent of its own states. It is so clothed because the material universe is the appointed Divine means for the creation of human beings, and their preparation for their eternal destinies. All angels in heaven, and all evil spirits in hell, have once been men living on this or some other earth. Death is nothing but the separation of the material envelope from the man, who survives it in the plenitude of his manhood. Thenceforward he lives in a world as real as the one he has left, but homogeneous with the spiritual body in which he now for the first time consciously exists. In that world he lives for ever, not by virtue of any power inherent in himself, but because

he is maintained in being by God, who creates and sustains from moment to moment all things that are, and because that Divine life will never cease to sustain him. "Here," I thought, "is at least something intelligible and credible." The difficulty was to see how the statements could be verified. What proof could be conceived firm and strong enough to sustain them? I could see little evidence offered beyond this: "I have seen. I know." Good—for you, Swedenborg! Perfect proof for you! But how for me? How are you going to translate *your* certainties into certainties for *me*?

I began to read the work entitled *Heaven and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen.* I found difficulties, obscurities, and, sometimes, what seemed like absurdities, in almost every page. Sometimes I was inclined to throw the book down and read no more. But the writer was obviously honest, and fully persuaded of the truth of his statements, and there was something in them that I could not easily account for as delusion, so I persevered.

I soon saw that, whatever might be the explanation of Swedenborg's experiences, he himself constituted a psychological problem of the first order; for he asserts gravely, soberly, and evidently with complete conviction, that for the last twenty-eight years of his life he was in constant intercourse with that spiritual world, which, according to him, always surrounds us, but is normally unseen, because our physical eyes are not adapted to perceive it. It was not a case of an occasional "vision" or "trance," of which there are numerous instances in connection with persons of all forms of religious belief, Christian and non-Christian. Swedenborg states that his intercourse with the spiritual world took place in a state of complete wakefulness of the

bodily senses. And in this intercourse he met with all the deceased people he had known during their earthly life, and great numbers with whom he was acquainted historically. He associated with them familiarly for various periods of time, sometimes for months, and was able to satisfy himself that they were the same persons that he had known before, whether personally or by the reading of history. These statements must be either true—I will not say in every detail, but in substance—or false. If false, they must be due to imposture or hallucination. Now, it is impossible for any candid, open-minded man to read Swedenborg's works with any attention and think him an impostor. His single-hearted determination to state the fact—however unpalatable—as he believed it to be; his manifest self-forgetfulness and devotion to his work, stamp him an honest man in the eyes of all honest men.

Then, if his statements were in substance untrue, he must have been the victim of hallucinations. In other words, he must have been insane; and even colossally insane—insane to a degree that no man who has preserved the outward appearance of sanity has ever been before. If Swedenborg was deceived as to the main fact of his intercourse with the unseen world; if all his experiences of this kind were simply his own dreamings and musings thrown into apparent objectivity; if the old acquaintances who had died and whom he thought he met again, and with whom he had friendly and long-continued intercourse, and the angels and spirits with whom he talked and the scenery he saw were simply the offspring of his own imagination, then he was mad, and that in a superlative degree.

This question of Swedenborg's complete sanity hung about my mind for many years, and only disappeared

from it with my full acceptance of his teaching. I doubt whether it will wholly vanish from any mind on any other terms.

Ever since I became firmly convinced of the truth of Swedenborg's teaching, it has been my desire to present it in the simplest possible form; and this book is the result. It is not possible to make Swedenborg's doctrines quite easy to understand, for they require a reconstruction of our habitual modes of thought on almost every subject; but they are in their main outlines simple when understood. It is in the displacement of our own preconceptions that the difficulty principally consists.

The aim of this work is to give a general idea of the main features of Swedenborg's teaching, so that a reader who wishes to go to the fountain-head for his information may have some outline of the system of thought propounded by him in his mind, into which he can fit the various particulars which he meets with in the course of his study. Swedenborg's works are often found difficult to understand because this kind of preparation has been neglected. The reader encounters unfamiliar conceptions and startling statements, which are as unintelligible to him as a single bone would be when detached from the skeleton of which it formed part.

The mental attitude of one who has fully made up his mind with regard to any system of religious doctrine is apt, I think, to be rather unattractive to one who is still entangled in the mazes of doubt, for whose use especially this work is designed. "Ah!" he thinks, "this man has never felt *my* difficulties! It is all plain sailing to *him*." If this book has any value it arises from the fact that the difficulties with which it

deals are those through which the author himself had to fight his way during many years of study.

It is a good rule, though one not altogether easy to practise, in commencing the study of Swedenborg's works, not to trouble oneself much about the difficulties one encounters. They often vanish insensibly as one becomes better acquainted with the system, and especially as one becomes convinced of the reality of that spiritual world which Swedenborg describes and which is the necessary postulate of all his teaching. I have often wished that I had kept a record of the difficulties I met with when I first read *Heaven and Hell*, for I cannot now even remember what they were.

There is, in reality, I think, only one fundamental difficulty involved in Swedenborg's doctrine of the Spiritual World, and that is the difficulty of believing that the mind of man is itself a spiritual body. Matter appeals to our senses and dominates our thought so insistently that we are apt almost unconsciously to become possessed by the idea that it is the essential reality, and this, although we may repudiate materialism as a philosophical theory. Yet mind, and the world of mind, or spiritual world, must be pre-eminently real, for out of it come all the issues of life.

CHAPTER I

SWEDENBORG A PROBLEM

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG was born in 1688, the third child and second son of Jesper Swedberg, Bishop of Skara in Sweden; and died in 1772. During the first fifty-six years of his life he devoted himself, after his education was completed, to the duties of his office as assessor of the College of Mines, under Polhem, the famous Swedish engineer, and to the study of mathematics, mechanics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, anatomy, physiology, and psychology, traversing, indeed, the whole range of the science and philosophy of the time; and this not as a mere student but as an active investigator and theorist.

Throughout this period of his life, devoted to theoretical and practical science and to philosophy, Swedenborg appears to have been a man of deep though unobtrusive religious conviction; but he had given no special attention to theology, and, in the main, accepted the Lutheran theology which had been instilled into his mind during his childhood and youth. In the year 1744 commenced that open intercourse with the spiritual world which continued without interruption (except for a few days shortly before his death) during the rest of his life. Two years afterwards he resigned his appointment as assessor, and devoted himself wholly to that new office to which he believed he had been called.

The credibility of the statements he made on the basis of this spiritual experience must depend—since they cannot be verified by personal observation—on

his own character and conduct, and on the nature of the statements themselves. It is with the first of these —the question of his competence and trustworthiness as a witness—that we have now to deal.

It is clear that if Swedenborg did not come into contact with a real world external to himself and with real people there, and yet had the firmest conviction that he did, he must have been the victim of delusions so sustained and consistent as to constitute a psychological marvel unprecedented in history. This is not a case of occasional apparitions, but of a consistent dual life lived during more than a quarter of a century. Nor was the observer a hysterical or excitable person, but a singularly composed, sedate thinker and investigator of mature years, who carried his habits of careful and methodical research into this strange and unforeseen sphere of labour. The theory of delusion requires us to believe that hallucinations of the most convincing and consistent kind can exist continuously during twenty-eight years in a mind to all appearance calm, logical and systematic. But that is only a part of the problem.

When a man's fancy takes the bit in its teeth and persuades him that its fashionings are objective realities, it may be expected to lead him a pretty dance. Having absolutely nothing to check it, where need it stop? Can unbridled imagination be content to tread the same round, to make the same report as to essential facts, for twenty-eight years? In Swedenborg's experience it may be said there is no trace whatever of inconsistency or variation. Development there was in his insight into and appreciation of his experiences, but as to the facts themselves, his statements from first to last are identical.

Moreover, these statements are found to embody a philosophy of creation, and man as part of creation, which is the most comprehensive, coherent and harmonious that has ever been given to the world. If Swedenborg had put forward his teachings as theories instead of stating them as facts, I do not doubt that they would have been ranked as one of the most ingenious attempts to deal with those profound problems which from age to age occupy the human mind that has ever been promulgated. Can insight, rationality, order, harmony be evolved from hallucination?

Of course, if Swedenborg's statement that he was in constant intercourse with the denizens of the spiritual world is taken as incontestable proof that he was the subject of hallucinations, inquiry on the subject is barred. But is such an attitude of mind reasonable? It is obviously based on the tacit assumption that there is no spiritual world into which men pass at death. Because, if there were, being a real world and full of real people, it must be cognisable by senses appropriate to its phenomena; and no one can prove that man does not possess, latent in him during his earthly life, the faculties which will enable him hereafter to sensate that world, nor that those faculties could not possibly become active while he was still living on earth. That Swedenborg's intromission into conscious intercourse with the spiritual world was unprecedented, and resulted in disclosures which, if true, must profoundly modify many of the beliefs current in the Christian world, has no weight as an objection; for our progress in the knowledge of natural things has by no means taken place along anticipated lines. If our ancestors of even a hundred years ago had been told of the telegraph, the telephone, the photograph, the phonograph,

electric lighting and traction, wireless telegraphy, liquid air, radio-activity, and other wonders of modern science, would it not have seemed to them like an incredible fairy tale? Why should we assume that the knowledge of supernatural things, if such things there be, may not surpass and even falsify expectation as much as the great modern developments of natural science have done? We have no means of deciding *a priori* what is possible and what is not. Every fact is its own proof, and the only evidence of it available or conceivable, outside the range of strict logical deduction, is that of one who knows. We ought, therefore, to be careful not to reject the evidence of a competent witness who states facts within his own experience because they do not accord with our preconceived ideas. The world is too wonderful and too full of unexpected things to permit a thoughtful man to say to fact, "Thus far shalt thou come and no farther."

Swedenborg's conduct with regard to his own abnormal experiences was not at all what we should expect from a man of disordered mind. The enthusiast who believes himself the recipient of a revelation is apt to make his revelation suffice for itself. Swedenborg always asserted that his spiritual experiences were a subordinate though indispensable part of the mission to which he had been called. That mission was to expound the true literal import and to unfold the inner or spiritual meaning of the Word of God. For this end it was necessary that he should be brought into open intercourse with the spiritual world; see that the Word is there too, in a spiritual form adapted to the state of those who read it; see that the spiritual substances of which that world consists present to the

senses of spiritual beings the same appearances as are seen in a material embodiment on earth, and are causally connected with these—because this is the main basis upon which it is possible to found a definite spiritual exegesis on the letter of the Word.

One would anticipate that a man whose mind was so far unhinged as to mistake its own musings and imaginings for external objects would hasten to proclaim the new and supernatural knowledge he thought he had acquired. But Swedenborg showed no such haste. After the opening of his spiritual senses in 1744 he began to study Hebrew, so that he might be able to read the Old Testament Scriptures in the original. He then set himself to read the Word from beginning to end, many times over, minutely comparing passage with passage, and word with word. It was only after spending two or three years in these preliminary studies that he began to write his first great expository work, *Arcana Cœlestia*, published in 1749.

Swedenborg never showed a trace of the sense of personal importance which is so characteristic of the enthusiast. He showed no disposition to form a sect. He published his works in Latin, and contented himself with distributing them freely wherever he thought them likely to be useful. He did not even put his name to any of them until four years before his death. His life after his spiritual experiences commenced was passed as it had been before, in the most assiduous work. Though, owing to his incessant labours, he was much of a recluse, in social life he was by universal consent a polished gentleman, accessible, genial, joining freely in conversation on all subjects; never obtruding his theological convictions or peculiar experiences; but always ready to talk freely about them to any one who

would approach them in a serious spirit, and able to silence with dignity any one who did not.

In fact, Swedenborg displayed none of the characteristics which he ought to have displayed, if he was the victim of such profound delusion as the hallucination theory supposes. Sobriety, dignity, consistency, industry, clear perception, method, marked all he said and did. There are in him, in short, all the indications of a well-balanced mind. There is absolutely nothing to be alleged against his competence as a witness but this: "He said he conversed with the dead, therefore he *must* have suffered from hallucinations!" With such a prejudice it is impossible to reason. It cuts itself off from disproof. It is a mere begging of the question.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRITUAL WORLD IN GENERAL

THE Spiritual World includes three great divisions, Heaven, Hell, and an intermediate region which Swedenborg called "the World of Spirits." In the last man lives, as an unconscious denizen of the spiritual world, during his life on earth; and in this he awakes, after the brief period of unconsciousness which usually accompanies physical death. There are innumerable subdivisions of each of these great primary divisions, but with them we need not now concern ourselves. The central fact of them all is that they are essentially *states* of the individual and collective human mind; Heaven being constituted by a confirmed love of good and of the truths which support, enlighten, and direct it; Hell, by a confirmed love of self, and of the falsities by which it is supported and justified. The World of Spirits is a state in which influences both from Heaven and Hell meet in the same mind; where, during man's life on earth, his choice is made between them, and after death the results of that choice are fully disclosed.

Swedenborg's statements about the spiritual world often raise in the same mind two difficulties of an opposite kind. On the one hand, life in that world, as described by him, is so like life in this, that his teaching seems to reduce the vague, emotional ideas which most people who believe in a future life form, by methods of which they are but dimly conscious, to something like

commonplace. And on the other hand, the fundamental facts of that world seem so remote from human experience that it is difficult to conceive of a real, stable and vivid human existence subject to such conditions. Whether there be any substance in these difficulties remains to be seen. They at least afford a convenient line of exposition; and I will, therefore, state briefly in what respects life in the spiritual world, as depicted by Swedenborg, resembles life in this world, and in what respects it differs.

They are alike in these respects. When the separation of a man from his physical body is completed, which is usually on the third day after his decease, he finds himself, so far as his senses inform him, exactly what he was before, except that the material world and all that it contains have absolutely disappeared from his consciousness. Every bodily and mental faculty is perfect. His heart beats, his lungs respire, he eats, drinks, and sleeps, he mingles in society, converses with others, and amuses himself according to his tastes. He reads, studies and works according to his aptitudes and the habits he has formed. A man is a man, a woman a woman, and a child a child still. He finds himself in a world the scenery and surroundings of which closely resemble those of the world he has left. There are hills and valleys, streams, lakes, seas, animals, plants, houses and cities, and people living in them. In a word, he is surrounded by objects such as he was familiar with during his life on earth. There is no apparent difference whatever. Swedenborg, indeed, repeatedly states that the similarity of the other world to this, in all its outward aspects, is so complete, that a man does not know, unless he reflects on the subject, that he is not still living in his physical body and in a material world. Here, however, in the external appear-

ances of things, the similarity ends. The dissimilarity is great, and not so easily described.

Though the objects of that world appear to be separated by spaces, like the objects of the natural world, the spaces are of an entirely different order. The objects sensated there are spiritual objects, though presented under appearances like those of natural objects, and the spaces in which they are seen are spiritual spaces. They are not fixed as material spaces are, because there is no matter or physical sensation there to constitute such fixity. The objects which are sensated by spiritual beings are states of their own minds and of the minds of others with whom they are in more or less close and permanent relations; that is, the objects of the spiritual world, regarded as a whole, are all the infinite varieties of goodness and truth, and of the perversions of these, which are the substances and forms that constitute it. In other words, angels and spirits sensate spiritual qualities as objective forms; their sensory state being just the contrary of that of men in the world, who sensate material objects, while spiritual qualities outside their own minds are not sensibly existent to them, except so far as they learn to discern them through the veil of matter.

The conception of the spiritual world as being divested of fixed or limited space, and consequently of definitely measurable time (for all the measures of time depend on the motions of matter in space), is fundamental in Swedenborg's teaching. Unless we can bring ourselves to believe, that at least there *may* be a real world which is not in space and time such as we know in this world, it is impossible to believe in or even to conceive the nature of his experiences. The conception will, I imagine, present little difficulty to a mind that is

somewhat versed in psychology, provided its knowledge is derived from direct inspection of the processes of mind and not merely from text-books.

The spiritual world, considered as an object of sensation, is created by God through the minds of angels and spirits and in correspondence with their states, individual and collective. That world is real because it is His creation, and because it bodies forth the supreme realities of human existence, which are spiritual. The difference between the state of consciousness of angels and good spirits (or those who are becoming angels) and our own is, that whereas we apprehend objects as external to and independent of ourselves, and see little in them that is germane to our spiritual states, their consciousness is primarily fixed on the states of mind out of which the sensible objects are generated and which they embody and depict. And this bent of their minds does not mean, as might be imagined, an everlasting concentration of their consciousness on themselves, but the precise opposite of this. For they know that they receive all the things which constitute Heaven within them and around them as free gifts out of the abundance of the Divine love and mercy, and they love to have it so. It is not, therefore, self that they see when they look within and around them, but something from the Source of all unselfish good, who has moulded them into and keeps them in some resemblance, however remote and imperfect, to Himself.

I am aware how exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, it is for the mind in certain states to grasp the idea of a world devoid of fixed spatial conditions with any confidence. For we instinctively, almost unconsciously, assume that the external world exists, exactly as our sensations reveal it to us, by a self-sustaining power; in

a word, that its existence is extra-mental. How little justification there is for this assumption every student of philosophy is aware. There is no harm, however, in thinking that the things we sensate are exactly like our sensations. That is how we are meant to think for the purposes of our work in the world. It is only when we begin to reason adversely to the Divine from these sense impressions that they become dangerous, and may become fatal; for they may lead to a practical, if not theoretical, atheism. Beware, then, lest you permit the conception of the external world as existing independently of mind, to dominate your ideas of God and Divine things. Perhaps enough has been said to show that there may be weight in Swedenborg's warning, "Do not, I beseech you, mingle your thoughts about spiritual things with time and space; for to the degree that time and space are in your thoughts you will not understand them."

Let me beg those to whom such an idea may seem difficult to grasp, to put this question seriously and reverently to themselves, "Ought we to think of God as existing in space and time?" If the answer is "Yes," one or other of two consequences, both disastrous to clear spiritual thought, will ensue. Either we must conceive of God as a Person located in some spatially measurable portion of His universe; that is, as being in reality neither infinite nor omnipresent; or if, shrinking from this, we try to preserve the idea of His omnipresence, it will be difficult to avoid confounding His immanence with some undefined inmost principle of nature. But if the answer is "No"—and this is the doctrinal position of the whole Christian world—if the supreme Source of all being, reality and power is not in space and time, why may there not be worlds of real

and orderly being, created and sustained by Him, which also are not in space and time?

If the reality of a non-spatial spiritual world be granted, and that man, as a spiritual being, lives in it, even during his life on earth, Swedenborg's experiences become at once intelligible and even simple. The only condition needed to qualify him to undergo those experiences was, that those faculties which normally remain quiescent till after the death of the earthly body should be quickened into activity during his life on earth, so that he might not only have open, sensible experience of the spiritual world, but be able to make it known by the press. The progressions of that world are as real as those of this; but they are mental, not physical progressions. A man's spiritual journeys consist in all those states of other minds with which he is brought into more or less sympathetic, or, it may be, antipathetic relations. As Tennyson finely says:

> Eternal process moving on,
> From state to state the spirit walks.

Swedenborg could traverse the spiritual world, as it were, from end to end, without being in the least impeded by his earthly body, whose motions and restings had no relation whatever to these spiritual journeys.

CHAPTER III

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE, AND JUDGMENT

According to the conceptions of the future life commonly held, a man passes at death into a state wholly different from anything he had previously experienced; a state of which we can form no definite ideas, because we have no knowledge on which such ideas could be based. But as we are unable to think except by means of ideas, and we cannot help thinking about a world in which all we have loved and lost are, and to which we expect to go ourselves, it is not surprising that the scanty indications given in Scripture should have been made the basis of conceptions, usually vague, and sometimes inconsistent with each other. At one time the dead are spoken of as "asleep"; in a state of very imperfect consciousness, if conscious at all, awaiting reunion with a physical body like that which they laid aside at death. At another they are spoken of as being in heaven, in full enjoyment of its happiness.

According to Swedenborg's teaching there is no sudden break in a man's condition at death. He merely loses the consciousness of the material world in which he has hitherto lived, and passes into a consciousness of the spiritual world in which he had also lived, though unconsciously. In all the essential qualities that constituted him an individual human being, he remains exactly what he was before.

It is not too much to say that the total rejection at the Reformation of any states in the other life besides

those called heaven and hell rendered any rational conception of man's preparation either for the one or the other during his life on earth impossible. The general belief in the Protestant Churches came to be, in the teeth of the most explicit statements of Scripture, that faith alone was the qualification for heaven, and that every one who had faith would go there instantly on his decease or when his spirit was reunited to his body at the resurrection, however grave the evils to which he might have been prone during his life on earth. It inevitably followed that heaven was conceived as a state or place to which any one might be admitted, whatever his character might be; or that, if fitness was necessary, it could be miraculously induced in those who had faith at the moment of death. Now, both of these beliefs involve an arraignment of the Divine goodness, which we may keep out of sight, but which we cannot explain away or reconcile with our deepest and clearest perceptions of what constitutes goodness. For if no element of personal fitness enters into admission to heaven, or if the fitness can be produced by a mere exercise of Divine power, why is not every one, bad and good alike, admitted? Is not admission to heaven a good? And how can a Being of perfect goodness fail to do good to all, under all circumstances? We are compelled, therefore, to infer that if any one fails to reach heaven it must be because there is in him some obstacle to his being there which is so bound up in his very nature and constitution that even God cannot remove it. In what can such radical, insuperable obstacle consist?

According to Swedenborg's teaching the preparation of man for heaven is an organic preparation and a real reconstruction of his nature. Just as all the parts of

the human body are fitted by their forms and the relation they bear to each other to exercise the functions of physical life, so must the soul, of which the body is a material image and representation, be formed and fitted in all its parts for its supreme function of receiving with delight the Divine influx which is its true life and its heaven. The making of man into some likeness, however imperfect that likeness may be, to his Maker, is a new birth of his spirit, by which he becomes literally a "new creation." It means the formation in him of a new will and understanding quite different from the natural will and understanding, which are set upon selfish and worldly things. It is this new and regenerate mind which qualifies him to enter heaven. This is the Kingdom of God within him, without which it is utterly impossible for him to abide in heaven. The environment of every living creature must be adapted to its organisation, otherwise it will live in pain or perish. The spiritual organisation of man is no exception to this law. The spirit, when separated from the body, has sensations incomparably more exquisite than those it enjoyed in the body. If, therefore, an evil spirit were introduced into heaven, he would suffer torments far more excruciating and persistent than he endures in hell. Swedenborg, indeed, tells us, that entrance into heaven is denied to no one who desires it; but if the man be not of a heavenly nature, as soon as he breathes its air, he begins to be tormented like a fish taken out of water, or an air-breathing animal placed under the receiver of an air-pump. He shuns it as he would death itself; and finds no rest till he comes again among spirits congenial to his own nature. A man's own evils alone exclude him from heaven, and these only when they are so

rooted in his affections that he is not willing to have them removed.

But fitness for heaven and its correlative unfitness are not discernible by human insight in the vast majority of the race who pass into the eternal world by the gate of death. There are, indeed, some who have been so fully regenerated during their life on earth that, on laying aside the defilements of the flesh along with the fleshly body, they can at once enter heaven ; but these are few. The great majority of mankind are in states of mingled good and evil, truth and falsity, and these incongruous elements must be unravelled and separated and the essential remainder made homogeneous, before the man in whom they co-exist is prepared to enter heaven or hell. Evil and falsity cannot enter heaven ; nor can goodness and truth enter hell ; for they are irreconcilable opposites. Their mingling in the world of spirits or intermediate state is characteristic of that world or state and constitutes it. It is necessarily a temporary state, through which either heaven or hell is ultimately reached.

The choice which a man has made between God and self is not always apparent to others or even to himself during his life on earth. For every man has an inner and an outer range of conscious mind. The former is the secret place where, screened from all observation of his fellow-creatures, he transacts the affairs of his inner and essential self. The latter is that range of thought and feeling by which he governs his speech and actions in his intercourse with others. We are all aware of the existence of this dual range of mind from the case of hypocrites, with whom the two may be at variance. We know, too, that for good reasons those who are upright and sincere do not

always express the desires or opinions they privately entertain. By means of this external range of mind every one learns from childhood to act in accordance with civil laws and social conventions, so as to wear outwardly the appearance of justice, kindness and other virtues. If he is inwardly in favour of these virtues, the separation between his internal state of mind and his outward actions is always tending to be obliterated; for a sincere man is unwilling to say or do anything which is not in accordance with his real feeling and thought. But if in the secret chamber of his soul he repudiates goodness, and is only restrained from the open indulgence of evil by self-regarding motives, a great contrariety will spring up between these inward states and his outward conduct. Thus two men may appear outwardly to have the same character and yet be wholly different. In this inner sphere of mind every one, without exception, comes to have a predominating love either for God and goodness from Him or for self. This predominating love results from the choice he makes, day by day and hour by hour, in this inner sphere of mind, between good and evil, truth and falsity, as they present themselves to him, through his experience of life. The choice is inevitable, for it is the purpose for which man is created. It is inevitable because there are only these two things to choose between. A man cannot permanently hesitate and vacillate between good and evil. As to that which Swedenborg calls man's "ruling love," that which he supremely desires and strives to attain, he must choose the one or the other. The choice does not consist in any merely sentimental preference. It is willing, not mere wishing. It is shown by conduct, by a more or

less earnest and persistent effort to govern his motives as well as his actions by the principles that he inwardly approves. Many evils may adhere to the man who has chosen good. Many virtues may seem to be the possession of the man who has chosen evil. The one is fighting against his evils *because* they are evils. The other is merely suppressing their outward manifestation lest they should injuriously affect his interests. In his secret mind he cherishes them, and would indulge them if he dared.

The consequence of all this is that good and evil seem to be inextricably mixed together in men who are still living in this world, whether they be good or bad. This is especially the case in the consciousness of the good—that is, with those whose affections are predominantly set on goodness—for there are no other good than these. To them is often brought home the truth of the words of the Apostle Paul: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." To the evil the discordance is not so apparent, because with them there is no struggle except to gain as much satisfaction of their desires as they can without sacrificing too much by their indulgence.

To put the matter in its simplest form, every man, whatever his religious beliefs may be, acquires during his life on earth a genuine *conscience*—that is, a real regard for good for its own sake; or he destroys conscience in himself so completely that the virtues he may seem to possess are merely practised from a naturally good disposition, or for the exaltation of self in one form or another. At heart he regards conscience as

a folly, or as a mere superstition, useful for the maintenance of civil society among the ignorant. When a man passes by death into the world of spirits, he carries with him everything that he had in the world except the material body. He still has this external range of mind, by which he is able to present an appearance to others that is foreign to his real nature. In the intermediate state, therefore, the good and the wicked can, at first, associate together, because their inward states are still veiled. But this state speedily undergoes a change through the gradual sinking into quiescence, and so into apparent extinction, in each individual, of that range of mind by which he regulated his conduct towards others. It subsides into quiescence insensibly, himself being unaware of the change; and in proportion that the habit and even the very idea of keeping up appearances sinks into oblivion, he enters more and more fully into the state of mind in which he willed and thought within himself in the world, when he felt himself entirely free from the observation of his fellows. When the process is completed, he appears manifestly to himself, and to others, what he was really—that is, interiorly — before. Thus everything that he only "seemed to have" is taken away from him; and what he had only spoken in the ear in secret he now proclaims openly.

This is the process of judgment. It consists in the disclosure of what the man who undergoes it really *is*, that is what he really *loves*, through the removal of those faculties by which his essential state as to affection was formerly disguised. As it progressively takes place in the inwardly evil man, association with those who are good becomes impossible. A segregation takes place; and by the inevitable law of "like to like,"

which is the gravitation of the spiritual world, those who are of similar disposition draw together and the dissimilar are separated.

The essential fact, which the process of judgment discloses, is whether a man possesses a genuine conscience or not. If he does, with whatever religious errors he may have been imbued during his life on earth, whatever evils may have adhered to him hereditarily or through his own conduct, he is yet capable of being prepared in the world of spirits for heaven. In his case the removal of that outward range of mind by which he governed his speech and actions, shows him wiser and better than he ever appeared before; because his inward affection for good was far in advance of anything he had ever been able to attain, and because the evils that afflicted him resided principally in that very range of mind which is now vanishing from his consciousness. The same process in the wicked, or, in other words, those who have no conscience, strips off every veil and pretence by which an outwardly decorous life was maintained. What process of judgment can be conceived more just than this? What judgment other than this can the God of truth pronounce? A man is not judged by the acts he has done in the body, whether they have been good or evil, for these are often but remotely related to his essential states of mind. He is judged by his love for good or evil, truth or falsity, for this is his very self. In reality, he judges himself by the choice he makes then—the outcome of innumerable choices which he has made and ratified during his life on earth.

CHAPTER IV

HEAVEN

It is difficult to arrive at a clear conception of the ideas which Christian people have about Heaven. The word is often on their lips, and no doubt denotes something which is to them of supreme value, but they find it difficult to state in precise terms what that something is. Probably they feel that no exact knowledge has been given of its nature, and that such conceptions of it as a devout imagination may form must be held somewhat tentatively. They rather shrink from declaring explicitly, "I believe this or that about it."

I think, however, we may assume that the following ideas about Heaven are, or were not long ago, generally held by Christians.

That, regarded as a society, it consists of two classes—angels and men.

That all its inhabitants have a vivid and constant perception of the personal presence of God.

That their chief occupation is the worship of God, as a ceremonial act.

That there is nothing of the nature of work there; nor, consequently, any recreation as a preparation for renewed and reinvigorated work.

That there is a complete annihilation of evil there.

That there is the same heaven for every one of its inhabitants.

That the distinction of sex, if not entirely abolished, constitutes no essential element in the life of Heaven.

The teaching of Swedenborg traverses these conceptions in almost every direction. There are no angels who were originally created such. All have once been men, on this or some other planet; because earthly life is the means by which God creates angels. It is remarkable how little support is to be found in Scripture for the belief that angels and men are beings of different origin. Wherever angels are spoken of they are described as *men*. There is absolutely no justification in Scripture for the wings which imagination has bestowed upon them.[1]

Heaven consists essentially in the presence of God in the whole Heaven and in every heart there, not as a visible object, but in the inmost recesses of the soul; a presence known and delighted in as the source of every feeling, thought and action. God Himself is Heaven, because everything that constitutes Heaven is from Him and nothing whatever of the angel's own. But the mode and degree in which He is present with each angel depends on a certain faculty of reception acquired during his sojourn on earth, according to the degree in which he endeavoured to make his religious belief the rule of his life; or, in other words, according to the character of the conscience he has thus acquired. Consequently, as this faculty of reception is never exactly the same in any of the angels, none of them can be said to be in exactly the same heaven. Nevertheless there are innumerable communities of angels based on similarity of spiritual character; that is, on similarity in the mode and degree in which they are capable of receiving Divine guidance with delight.

There is no absolute destruction of evil even in Heaven. For nothing which has formed part of the

[1] For a full discussion of this subject, see Noble's *Appeal*, p. 279

spiritual nature of man, and so been incorporated in its organic forms, can ever be annihilated. The angels, therefore, carry their evils—that is, the perverted spiritual organic forms in which their evils resided—with them into Heaven; but those evils are kept in subjection and quiescence by Divine power. "It is Heaven to the angels," says Swedenborg, "to be withheld from what is their own," or their self-hood. These evils are even, at times, permitted to enter, in some measure, into their consciousness. For the angels are, in themselves, but frail beings. They are not in Heaven by virtue of any merit or strength of their own; and if they experienced no changes of state, not only would there be no progress for them, but they would be apt to imagine that they possessed their heaven through some power inherent in themselves; and thus heaven would depart from them. They are, therefore, permitted to experience, from time to time, a remote, subconscious recrudescence of their evils; and consequently a diminution of their sense of delight in the inflowing Divine life. This constitutes a period of spiritual shade or obscurity, with something of sadness, which is their evening; out of which they afterwards emerge into their morning or fulness of joy. By these alternations of state the angels are kept in continual spiritual progress; for the regeneration of man, if begun on earth, continues to eternity.

Far from being a place of indolent leisure or continuous ceremonial worship, Heaven is a scene of constant activity and industry. All the angels have their daily occupations, and these are the chief source of their happiness. For "heavenly love consists in loving uses for their own sake." And because each angel loves the

use for which he is fitted, and in which he is therefore engaged, he can be made happy to the full extent of his capacity in performing that use. They have also their recreations and amusements; for they are human still, and continuous, unremitting application to one species of activity, even the highest of which they are capable, would overtax and enfeeble their minds.

There are also governments and administrations in Heaven; for all its inhabitants are not of equal capacity. There are the relatively wise and simple; and the simple need the guidance of the wise; and the wise give that guidance, not in any spirit of domination, but from their delight in service. Their higher delight in service makes them, indeed, the wiser; for the love of being of use to others is the very faculty by means of which the Lord, from whom all true wisdom comes, dwells in their minds. There are also assemblies for public worship; but these are merely aids to that daily life of active usefulness from the love of doing good in which the worship of God essentially consists, on earth or in Heaven.

Heaven, Swedenborg teaches, is a place and state of infinite variety; so much so that, as has been already stated, it may be said that the heaven of one angel is never identical with that of another. Nevertheless this endless variety is combined into one stupendous and harmonious Unity, which he calls "Maximus Homo," the grand or greatest man; the realisation, on the largest scale, of the Divine Idea; the most perfect finite image and representation of God himself. Few things in Swedenborg's teaching have been felt so difficult to understand as his doctrine of the universal prevalence of the human form. Yet if his doctrine of Creation is accepted, this corollary is simple and inevitable. God,

says Swedenborg, is a Divine *Man*—and, indeed, the only Man, since He is the one self-subsisting source of the qualities which constitute true manhood. All finite manhood is derived from Him. He creates man in His own image in order that he may be able to receive His gifts and in his finite sphere exhibit something of likeness to Him. The human form, therefore, is primarily spiritual. It is only as a derivation from this spiritual form that the human body exhibits it in a physical embodiment or representative image. Every part and function of the human body represents something which in the soul is spiritual and in the Lord is Divine. And as there are infinite things in the Lord there are derived from Him indefinite varieties in the goodness and truth possessed by angels and men; and these arise not from any difference in His relation to them—for He is always the same—but from differences in their capacity for reception. The aggregate of these spiritual capacities in humanity regarded as a whole constitutes a spiritual organism resembling, on the largest scale, that which a single regenerate mind presents on the smallest. The human form is primarily an assemblage of spiritual uses, so combined that each contributes to the perfection of the whole. The same cause produces the human form in individuals, societies and the universal heaven—namely, the formative energy of the Divine Love and Wisdom, whose finite likeness it is.

There is marriage in Heaven. For man is man and woman woman, in mind as well as in body, and each is meant to be the complement and partner of the other. Neither can reach the fullest perfection of which he or she is capable except in a holy and happy union with the other. Apart from each other they are incomplete. The radical difference in their natures is precisely that

which enables each to supplement and complete the other.

This difference of mental constitution and correlative need that the one should supply the deficiencies of the other accompany them into the other life. It cannot but be so if they are to remain themselves. Marriage, therefore, exists there, but spiritual marriage; essentially a marriage of minds.

To every one who hears statements such as these, the words uttered by our Lord must occur as a great difficulty, because they seem so precise and exclusive, "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven"—Matthew xxii. 30. But in considering the import of these words, we must remember that men in debased states of mind must be addressed in terms suited to their apprehension, and which express, therefore, a relative and not an absolute truth. Thus in the Word we find anger, hatred, and vengeance attributed to the Lord; not because these evil passions exist in Him, but because these are the aspects which His eternal hostility to evil wears to the apprehension of wicked men, and by which their evils are most effectually restrained. By such ideas alone can the consequences of rebellion against His laws be presented to their minds so as to be intelligible to them. The Sadducees and the Jews generally of our Lord's day had a very gross conception of marriage. It was to them merely legalised intercourse between the sexes. There is no marriage of this kind in Heaven. The Lord spoke necessarily in a manner adapted to the states and ideas of His hearers.

Yet there is a sense in which our Lord's words are literally true, and nevertheless do not exclude marriage as a state common to all who are "as the angels."

Marriage has been dimly seen to be the type of every kind of union between men and even things which are dissimilar but complementary, and so capable of attaining a higher perfection by union than would be possible to each singly. Thus Shakespeare says in one of his sonnets :

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments :

and Milton speaks of "Music married to immortal Verse." Indeed Nature is so permeated throughout her kingdoms with something resembling sexual union as to suggest that the sex relation springs from and represents something that exists in the eternal source of all being. This Divine prototype of marriage is the union of infinite Love and Wisdom in God. These in Him form a One, for they are inseparable ; but in their finite manifestation in creation they appear to be distinct, because created things receive and embody them in varying degree and proportion. The sexes in man do so ; the woman being more the embodiment of affection, and the man of intellect, but both are so constituted that by their union the one may supply what is wanting in the other. The foundation of heavenly marriage is a common love of God, a united endeavour in all the relations of life to shun evils as sins against Him. Where there is this interior and spiritual union, marriage contracted on earth may endure in the other life. But where no marriage bonds are formed on earth, or those actually contracted are not capable of being perpetuated in the eternal world, for all who enter Heaven the marriage state and partner are provided ; and yet the marriage is not, as to its essence and foundation, accomplished in Heaven but on earth. A good man even during his life on earth is spiritually conjoined to

some heavenly community, akin to his peculiar temperament and genius ; and when he has put off in the world of spirits the earthborn states which adhere to him from his life in the body, and which, so long as they adhere, prevent his full enjoyment of heavenly blessedness, he finds in that community a spiritual home, full of dear relations and friends who perfectly understand him, and whom he perfectly understands, and whom he seems to have known all his life. His open and manifest union with this community takes place in Heaven, but the foundation of it, all that makes it real and enduring, was laid upon earth. So with the marriages of the angels. Those who have not formed spiritual unions on earth are not deprived of the sweetest of human relations ; but they do not choose for themselves from any self-begotten impulse ; nor do their friends choose for them. These marriages are indeed " made in Heaven," for they are Divinely ordained and provided ; but they are provided for during life on earth. Unknown to each other, perhaps, during their earthly life, their capacity to enter into that happy union is foreseen and fostered by the Divine Providence. By paths devious and unknown, they are at last brought together in the other life, and meeting, recognise that they are each other's. This is to be " as the angels of Heaven " ; to be united in the love and service of God by bonds so sweet, spontaneous and all-pervasive, that, as Swedenborg says, they scarcely feel as if they were two, but as if they were one ; so perfectly is whatever each possesses of spiritual good and its delights communicated to the other.

CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

If it is difficult to ascertain what people think about Heaven it is still more difficult to find out what ideas they form of hell. The subject is shunned nowadays, even in the pulpit. It is scarcely polite to suggest that any member of a congregation assembled to worship God can possibly go to such a place. Yet if, as Swedenborg represents, hell is essentially the love of self dominant in the will, confirmed and justified by the intellect, and carried out in the life so far as that can be done without entailing consequences too disastrous to be faced, we can hardly look abroad on human life without seeing a veritable hell there; and the experience of every man who is earnestly striving after righteousness in motive, thought and deed must have convinced him that there is at least a possible hell in his own breast.

We must, then, understand the nature and origin of evil if we would understand the nature of hell. And to do this we must remove from our minds the idea that God is an almighty autocrat, who can bring about any result He desires by a mere fiat, or without means. If God's omnipotence were of this kind, we could not acquit Him of responsibility for the existence of evil; for He could, if He chose, at once transform every bad man into a good man, and every evil spirit into an angel of light. Nay, evil need never have existed at all, for He might have secured any ultimate good which

may be derived from the permission of evil without permitting it. If we believe that God is infinite and unchangeable Love we *must* believe that evil is permitted for some good end which, without its permission, could not have been attained.

The next step in a rational understanding of the nature of evil is to see that it is nothing in itself; that is to say, it has not an independent, but only a derivative existence. It is always the perversion and misuse of some quality or power which in its proper place and order is good, by disregard of the limits placed on conduct by God. These limits are the finite expression of principles existing in their origin and perfection in His own nature, and constitute the only foundation for real human welfare on earth or in Heaven.

This, however, only pushes the problem a step back. Wherein lies the necessity for admitting into the nature of man the possibility of this perversion? If the universe was created by a perfectly good God, for ends wholly good, and the creation was in itself "very good," as we are told, why should the creature for whom it was created, and in whom alone these ends could be realised, be capable of such perversion?

Swedenborg's answer is that the creation of man as a mature and fully-developed spiritual being cannot be effected except through his own choice, because this is what distinguishes him from all other created beings and makes him man. For choice to exist there must be alternative courses of action possible; not necessarily between good and evil, but at least between a higher and a lower good. We can conceive a being so constituted that the delights of the senses, and of the mind in all its faculties, higher and lower, should

be so completely in the order which God designed for them, that they might all be described as "very good." But if such a man had no insight enabling him to discern the superiority of the higher to the lower, and no power to choose whether he would gratify the one or the other; if there was no possible clashing between them; if the higher faculties of feeling and thought necessarily dominated the lower, he would be only a kind of spiritual automaton. But if the solicitations of the higher and lower natures acted independently; if an effort of will was needed to secure the predominance of the higher motives, then a real freedom of choice would exist for the being in whom these streams of impulse commingled. His sin would be in electing to indulge the lower impulses at the expense of the higher.

Somewhat after this manner is the fall of man as recorded in the early chapters of Genesis to be understood. The doctrine of a fall is discredited in these days. Man, the evolutionists tell us, has risen above the rest of the animals by a process of continuous upward progress, and it is a mere illusion to suppose that he has ever been better than he is now. If Swedenborg's interpretation of Scripture is sound, the doctrine of a fall will have to be reinstated, though in a much altered aspect. The judgment that followed it was no arbitrary condemnation for an isolated act of disobedience, in itself trivial. The fall was a departure from the fundamental laws of human welfare, which has been repeated again and again in the history of the race, and is the root of our sins to-day.

Man fell, not from a state of perfection imposed upon him independently of his own volition, but from one to which he had been raised by a long process of

spiritual education effected through his volition. Man came into existence as a spiritual being, possessed of a certain immature, rudimentary goodness, not unlike that of well-disposed children. But his affections and thoughts were inchoate, unformed, instinctive. To this elementary good the possibility of advance to a higher good was offered, by the presentation to his consciousness of truths suited to his state, which placed this higher good distinctly before his mind. These truths were offered to him for acceptance through his affections rather than through his thought; for these ancient men thought in and from their affections; which is, indeed, the best way of thinking, when the affections are good. As every such revelation was accepted in their wills and consequently embodied in their lives, it constituted an upward movement of the men and races who accepted it, and the basis of further possible upward steps. These progressive revelations and spiritual advances are briefly recorded in the six days of Creation spoken of in the first chapter of Genesis, culminating in the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. Then comes the seventh day, in which God is said to "rest from His work." A state had been reached in which human nature had been made accordant with the will of God; so that there was no longer anything in it to oppose and divert the aims of Divine Providence for its welfare. How long this process of elevation continued from first to last we are not told. A time came in the history of mankind when the race, or, at least, a part of it, had been lifted to a condition of spiritual beauty and perfection such as would seem to us ideal and impossible. These were "the days of heaven upon earth," and survive in literature as a legend of the Golden Age,

when men lived in mutual love, and the gods took an active part in the affairs of men. For in those days sensuality and worldliness had not drawn a thick veil, as now, over the inner world. Angels and spirits often appeared to the men of that time and taught them.

Try to imagine the spiritual condition of a man of that time. From the cradle he would be surrounded by good influences. Love, tenderness, care for others would have been from the first dawn of intelligence his daily bread. He would have but little hereditary evil to trouble him with its rebellious promptings; for his ancestors for ages past had shunned evils as sins against God, with a whole-hearted zeal and singleness of purpose of which we can form little conception; and they transmitted the virtues they had thus acquired to their descendants, in the form of good dispositions. His natural propensities would be on the side of good.

Heaven would indeed be "about him from his infancy." For angels would visit him in visible form and converse with him. The reality of the future life would not be open to question, for his own relations and friends who had passed by death into the eternal world would appear to him and assure him by irresistible evidence of their identity. Would such a man enter spontaneously and naturally into the way to heaven; walk along a primrose path to his eternal home, without a struggle, without self-denial? Not so. Natural, inherited good admits no one to heaven, any more than inherited evil condemns any one to hell. For him also there was a choice to be made, not between good and evil in the gross forms in which we know them, but between a higher and a lower good.

For in this man, as in us, there was a hierarchy of

powers one above the other, and his spiritual integrity depended on their being kept in their due order and relation. "Man," says Swedenborg, "was created to love himself and the world, his neighbour and heaven, and also the Lord." When the higher loves rule and the lower serve, all are good. But the lower loves do not spontaneously subordinate themselves to the higher. For this, effort is needed on man's part. These ancient men, therefore, were not born fit for heaven, nor made fit by merely following out their naturally good impulses. They, like us, needed to be regenerated through their choice of good; but their evil was a lower good which only became evil when it supplanted a higher.

It is not possible to trace here in detail the gradual process of spiritual declension recorded in the second and following chapters of Genesis. It is related in an allegorical form, because that was the mode of describing spiritual events which was customary with the men of that time. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are the only record left to us of a Divine revelation much more ancient than the rest of the Bible, and written in a different style, in which literal fact is not regarded any more than, we may presume, it was in the parables of our Lord. The historical form was used as a vehicle for spiritual history, appealing thus to a poetic and imaginative faculty which was native to the men of that time.

The Garden of Eden or Delight represents that state of the human mind, collective and individual, when all its powers have been brought into harmony with the Divine Will. In the midst is the Tree of Life, representing the inward perception that all the good enjoyed in that state comes from the Lord, and

delight in that perception. But there is also the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, representing the sense, on man's part, that he wills and thinks, or in other words, lives from himself. This tree was rightly placed in the garden, for without this feeling of independence man would not be capable of acting as a rational being, nor have any means by which he could voluntarily submit himself to the Divine Will. But the inhabitants of the Garden were forbidden to eat of this tree; that is, to become imbued with the belief that their apparent independence of God was real—was anything more than a constant gift of God to them.

They disregarded this injunction. Their self-love suggested that the appearance of independence was a reality. And now we find, from the answer of the woman to the serpent (which represents the sensuous nature of man, that in him which is in immediate contact with the natural world, and from which the temptation came), that the Tree of Life is no longer "in the midst of the garden" or the central fact in their consciousness, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Their fundamental and ruling perception was no longer that life and all that life means was from God and to be regarded as a trust from Him, but that it was their own. This was the first distinct step in the long declension which constituted the fall of man. It was not, at first, any abandonment of what we should call "practical good." They did not at once cease to love their neighbour nor the Lord; but they began to think with pleasure of the various virtues they possessed as being *their own*. From this, the further fall into actual evil was easy. If their own to possess, then their own to change. They were themselves as gods since they could originate life. Every impulse

that solicited them was to be indulged, for was it not Divine? Perhaps the absence of severe struggle against evil in the early men made their descendants a comparatively easy prey to this insidious principle when it had once taken possession of their minds. We can easily see whither it would naturally lead—to the authorisation and, as it were, deification of the most monstrous lusts.

CHAPTER VI

HELL

THE problem of the origin of evil, as presented by Swedenborg, may, possibly, now be more clearly understood. Man, in order that he may be a willing recipient of good from God, must have freedom of choice. He could not have this unless he appeared to live a life independent of God. If he felt that every impulse of will, and every thought, flowed into him from without, as is, indeed, the fact, he would seem to himself to be a mere channel for alien influences. He appears, therefore, to his own consciousness to live of and from himself; and yet his true happiness is to know that, despite the appearance, all that is really good in him is God's and not his own. Self, therefore, is the root of all evil; a self not in its origin evil, but capable of becoming evil if, instead of using it as a means of yielding himself to God, man makes it the abode of unregulated self-love and the delusions which self-love invokes as its reasons and justification.

When through the indulgence of self-love it has become organically rooted in the spiritual nature of men, it is transmitted to their children as a propensity to the same evils. But for these propensities their descendants are not responsible; nor, Swedenborg testifies, are they ever punished in the other life for such propensities, however vile and destructive they may be. What they are responsible for is their conduct in face of these inherited propensities, and of the truths which they themselves know and admit, and that condemn

them. Even if an inherited propensity be so strong as to sweep away a man's freedom for the moment, this is not the end of the matter. The moment of overwhelming passion passes, and his freedom of will and judgment is restored. What does he do then? Does he condemn himself for his lapse, lament it and pray for strength to enable him to resist it in future? Or does he thrust the thought of transgression aside; excuse himself; say, "It was only natural. Why should I not do what I like?" There is a vast difference in these two cases, which to an observer may look exactly alike. The man who perseveres in fighting against his evils, so far as he knows them, is never wholly a slave to them, however frequent and lamentable his lapses from the right path may be. For his inner will is against them. He would not fight against them if it were not. The only fatal thing is for a man to give himself up to his evils—to justify them, and to seek for occasions to indulge them. If he persistently does this, disregarding the inward monitions which will come to him from time to time, and make him pause in his downward career, his conscience will gradually decay. He will lose the perception that there is any real difference between good and evil; regard them as merely matters of individual taste or social convention. He will become spiritually dead.

It is solely of such "dead" men, Swedenborg states, that hell consists. No one is really sent to hell by God, though for the sake of such amelioration of his state as is possible the Divine Providence directs him thither and leads him every moment when he is there. He goes of his own choice; because there he finds a place and state which accord with his own; and there he desires to be. He loves his evils and does not wish to part with them. No one goes to hell who has a genuine conscience;

that is, a state of affection and its associated thought which makes him prefer any form of good, however lowly, to evil. If he has this he can be brought, it may be by a long road and through painful experiences, to some heaven congenial to his nature, and is infallibly so brought. The question of questions is as to his will. Does he really in his inmost soul *will* good, and *will* against evil? If he does he is salvable, and is saved. But if he wills evil and against good; if he has made evil his good and good his evil, what is to be done with him? Put him into heaven? He would be more miserable there than in hell. He himself is his own hell, and can find ease only in congenial surroundings and associates. Is he to be forcibly subjected to influences he detests and rejects? Of what use would that be to him or any one else? But if he is to be associated with others like himself must it not be under some restraint? All his affections are actively anti-social. They do not contemplate the general good, and through that the good of each and all, but his own exclusively, such as he conceives it. Imagine a concourse of such beings gathered together, with no external power over them to restrain their animosities and lusts. What a pandemonium of outrage and disorder there would be under such conditions! No such pandemonium exists. There is law in hell; and punishment swift and sure for those who infringe it. In the "perverted currents of this world" the evil-doer may escape detection or avoid the consequences of his crime. There he cannot. An "evenhanded justice commends the ingredients of his poisoned chalice to his own lips," instantly and inevitably. The punishment is proportioned to the offence; and is repeated as often as the offence is committed, with any necessary intensification, till the

offence is shunned, not because it ceases to be willed, but because its indulgence entails too much suffering.

Punishments are not inflicted by God nor by any agents of His, though they are permitted and controlled by Him for the good of those who cannot be reformed by any other means. They are inflicted by the man's own associates, who are imbued with cruelty, and gladly avail themselves of any opportunity of inflicting suffering which does not entail penal consequences to themselves. The effect of crime is to avert from the wrong-doer the protection which every inhabitant of hell has from the Lord; and to lay him open to the assaults of his associates, who otherwise are restrained from hurting him. Angels are indeed present, not to inflict punishment but to mitigate it, and see that it does not exceed in severity what is necessary.

Are we, then, to suppose that the sufferings of hell are eternal? Yes and no. These external punishments are not eternal. They are inflicted only for restraint, and when self-restraint is exercised, though only from fear of consequences, they cease. We may safely assume that no one will go on persistently practising evil against his fellows, when every indulgence of such a propensity is followed by intense suffering. Sooner or later the inhabitants of hell are brought by punishments to a state in which they voluntarily, though unwillingly, abstain from infringing the prescribed limits, which do not apply to their private conduct, but to their relations with others. Then punishment is no longer necessary, and is no longer inflicted.

Yet there is "a worm that dieth not and a fire that is not quenched." Punishment does not eradicate the love of evil, but only prevents its manifestation. The evils which a man loves, and which are himself, remain,

in spite of the abstinence arising from fear. They crave indulgence, but he dares not indulge them.

How far this inherent suffering may be mitigated we are not told; but a careful study of all that Swedenborg has said on the subject suggests that it may be so greatly modified as to cease to be acutely felt. We may hope that the assuagements which may be brought about by that Divine Mercy which constantly watches over the welfare of the evil as well as the good will be great. Habit, we know, "begets a kind of easiness" in this life, even when the new habit is not the result of true repentance, but is only adopted from a conviction that the consequences of the old habit were disastrous. An habitual drunkard may suddenly have his eyes opened to his own folly. He says to himself: "I am ruining my health and my prospects in life. From this hour no drop of alcohol shall pass my lips;" and he keeps to his resolve. For some days or weeks he has to endure what seems like infernal torment. The diseased craving clamours and rages for indulgence. Nevertheless he clenches his teeth and resists. Then a time comes when the craving assuages. Then a time when it is gone. He is his own man again. He can abstain without difficulty. He looks back with amazement to the time when he was a slave to drink. "What a fool I was!" he thinks. Now this change of conduct may take place in a man of strong will without any radical change in his spiritual nature. There may be no repentance; no real change of mind. The idea of shunning the evil of drunkenness as a sin against God may not occur to his mind; or if it occur may be contemned. The change may be purely the result of a calculation of worldly consequences to himself. Yet is it not a good, to himself and to others? He is healthy and strong,

and may, from such motives as he is capable of being influenced by, lead a life useful to his family and to society such as was impossible when half his time he was stupefied by drink or recovering from its effects.

In some similar way, I do not doubt, habit acts in hell; begetting "a kind of easiness" in the practice of that self-restraint which is necessary to avoid punishment. When this habit has been formed, it is possible that other ameliorations may be effected. Ambition, fame, and the love of approbation springing from self-love, are all worldly and intrinsically infernal motives; yet they are great begetters of uses in that strange, apparently chaotic medley which constitutes the society in which we live. If they were removed, would the necessary work of the world go on from the pure love of use and of good for their own sakes? So it may be that in hell self-regarding motives may be used by the Divine Providence to evolve a form of society progressively more and more refined and conducive to the welfare of all who compose it; and in which the bonds which restrain its inhabitants from injuring their fellows are concealed beneath social forms and customs which disguise their real nature. It is possible to conceive of a very high order of external civilisation, exhibiting the most polished forms of human intercourse, and apparently a high regard for the public good, which would, nevertheless, have self for its central motive, and therefore be essentially infernal in its nature. Such developments may be possible in hell. If they are possible, and if they would be beneficial, they will come. For the Lord is inexhaustible, unchanging Mercy. He cares for and watches over the inhabitants of hell as much as those of heaven, and will bring about whatever amelioration of their lot their state permits.

CHAPTER VII

CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE

EVERY one will admit that, if Swedenborg's representations of the nature of the future life are true, they are of immense importance; not merely because they enable us to regard physical death as a normal incident in the spiritual development of man—no more to be dreaded than is our going to sleep at night to wake again in the morning—but because they introduce us to a spiritual world in which we are living now; to the laws of which we are subject now; and the laws of which we can, in some measure at least, understand.

But, in Swedenborg's view, all this knowledge was rather a means to an end than an end in itself. That end was to enable man to attain rational conceptions of the purpose of his life on earth; of the nature of Revelation, the Divine Providence, and, indeed, of God Himself. All these can only be dimly understood so long as the spiritual world is entirely unknown. Before proceeding to consider his teaching on these subjects, therefore, it will be well to review the position we have reached.

"Important, if true." Yes, certainly. But are they true? Is there any verification possible of Swedenborg's statements; or must we accept them on his bare assertion? Well, Swedenborg's testimony should, I think, count for much; must count for much to any one who will make a patient and unprejudiced study of the man and his work. Granting his honesty,

which is transparent and indisputable, we can only account for his experiences as realities or as hallucinations.

In Chapter II. some of the preliminary difficulties of the hallucination theory were pointed out. Even the scanty outline of the results of his experiences so far given must, I think, be felt to intensify the difficulties. They assuredly show no mark of mental disorder. If we assume certain fundamental principles or facts, they are calm, logical, coherent developments from those principles. And the principles or foundation facts are such as have been admitted by many philosophic thinkers to be within the bounds of possibility. There is a note of veracity and actuality about the records that must, one would think, stagger the most sceptical. For my part, even when I first began to dip into Swedenborg's writings, I felt great difficulty in conceiving how such things could be the product of *mere* imagination, whether sane or distempered.

There is another side-blow to the hallucination theory, which no epitome can give, but only the direct study of the books themselves. Most people, on first reading Swedenborg's works, are rather repelled by his formal, methodical, unimpassioned style. He is "cold," they think. Certainly he has none of the easily kindled fervours which are part of the conscious or unconscious art of the *littérateur*, and especially of that species which is devoted to religious matters. Dr. Garth Wilkinson has described him as "the greatest of *un*sentimentalists." He moves through heaven and through hell; through realities, if realities they be, the most sublime and the most appalling, and his pulse does not seem to accelerate by a beat. We wish he were a little more human, and that his pages might be suffused here and there by emotion—pity,

horror, exultation, aspiration. But no! He is not there to feel, but to understand, and to report. So he walks through the eternal world—as it were, with his note-book in his hand—and simply records what he finds there.

"Not a lovable nature," you say. Perhaps not. Certainly not a lovable-at-first-sight one. But love at first sight is not always the most lasting, while loves that grow slowly often are. This distaste gives way as we become better acquainted with the man and his work. Swedenborg is not indifferent, though he is always calm. He is profoundly impressed with the importance of his theme, and keenly sensitive to the beauty of spiritual truth and the loveliness of genuine goodness. These waters are still, but they run deep.

But we gain something more—at least many people do—from a steady perusal of Swedenborg's works, than the correction of this natural misapprehension. We come to feel that his calm, detached, receptive frame of mind is just the quality to be desired in one who is to give us reliable information about the transcendent realities with which he deals. We do not want fervour, but facts.

But all these things are intrinsic to Swedenborg's teaching and method; and it is not possible to form an adequate opinion of their weight except by a careful and unprejudiced examination of his works at first hand. The question with which we started was, whether there is any independent corroboration of Swedenborg's statements available. To answer this, we must distinguish between his experiences, pure and simple, and his inferences from them, or explanations of them. Evidently, Swedenborg's experiences might be real, but not veridical, or only partially so.

This was the position taken with regard to him by the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers in his *Human Personality, and its Survival of Physical Death.* He admitted the reality of Swedenborg's experiences, but thought that he was unable to estimate their true value and import. This is an attitude of mind which is likely to become more common as the inveterate prejudices which have hitherto prevented any general serious examination of Swedenborg's teaching are broken down. It is, evidently, a tenable one. Swedenborg might have come into sensible contact with the spiritual world and with real persons there, and yet be partly or even wholly deceived as to the identity of those persons, and as to the constitution and laws of that world. It is illogical to prejudice the question of the fact of his experiences, by importing into it the question of the truth of the teachings he founded on them. On the other hand, an important step in advance will be made if we can convince ourselves that his experiences were trustworthy in this limited sense.

The reality of his experiences depends on two factors: first, the existence of a spiritual world; and second, the possibility of knowing anything about it by actual sensation during a man's life in the body.

Consider, first, the fundamental fact (or assumption, if you like) on which the possibility of Swedenborg's experience depends—that the mind is a substantial, organised form. If it is anything, must it not be a substance? I do not care, for our present purpose, whether the substance be regarded as material or immaterial. Suppose, if you like, that the substance of mind is a purer kind of matter. At all events, it must be a substance of some kind to be anything at all. But since the qualities of mind are so definitely distinguished

from those of matter, as perceived by the senses, as we know them to be, must we not conceive that the substance of our minds is as definitely distinguished from that of our bodies? The qualities of dead matter are extension, weight, colour, impenetrability, and we should have added, a few years ago, inertia. And, in fact, matter in the mass *is* inert, whatever its constituent elements may be. It never moves but when it is moved; and when it is moved, its movement never stops till it is arrested. Can any one of these qualities be predicated of mind? Here the qualities we have to do with are with feeling, thought, intention, reason, in all their myriad-fold modifications. Now the qualities of matter are all we know about it. They constitute matter as known to us. Must not the qualities of mind also constitute a mental substance? And as the qualities of the one are totally distinct from those of the other, must not the substances be distinct too?

But if mind is substance, must it not be also organised? If we could conceive a perfectly simple living body, its functions would be equally simple. The various functions of the body are the work of organs specifically adapted to produce them, and could not be produced otherwise. Now the functions of mind are at least as varied and complex as those of the body. Must not the mind, then, be organised also? And as the mind resides in the body and animates it, what more natural than to suppose that it, too, is in the human form?

If the mind is an organised substance, it must be capable of being sensated by appropriate faculties; that is, of becoming visible, tangible, and audible in its own way. But if this be admitted, there is no further

difficulty in the conception of the spiritual world as occasioning sensation in organs homogeneous with its own nature. For the spiritual world is but an organised aggregate of minds.

The body lives, we know not how. We know some of the external conditions of its life in this world, such as food, drink, and air; and internal conditions, such as the circulation of the blood and the motions of the lungs. We know that the body dies when deprived of these conditions. But do we know that the mind perishes with it? If it is of a different substance from the body, it may live in virtue of different conditions. "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live;" that is, by a Divine animation as well as physical conditions. But if the mind does not live by physical conditions, it does not necessarily perish when they are removed. It may only cease to animate the body, and continue itself to live in the same way that it did before. The fact can only be proved by experience; and it is an experience of this kind which we are now seeking to corroborate by a wider experience.

It is not denied that the belief that man survives physical death is almost, if not quite, universal. There is scarcely any savage or civilised race which does not hold this belief in some form. And the belief has been probably originated, and certainly maintained, by apparitions, visions; partial, indistinct and evanescent glimpses, as it were, into the unseen world where the deceased are supposed to survive. An attempt has been made to father this universal belief on dreams and hallucinations. But it is as well (notwithstanding Carlyle's sardonic *dictum*) not to imagine that mankind are "mostly fools," and to infer that this general

belief has been sustained by some more substantial experiences.

If we take the Bible records, we find in the earlier books a strange absence of any definite belief in man's survival of death; but in the earliest as in the latest the existence of an unseen world is assumed. When first an angel appears on the scene, no explanation is given. None is ever given. It is treated as a normal, natural—if also supernatural—fact. And these beings, if they are called by any name besides that of angels, are always called "men." The New Testament is admitted, alike by believers and unbelievers, to be simply built on the conception of an unseen and yet real world into which men pass at death.

Consider also the phenomena of modern spiritualism. Doubtless there is much imposture mingled with it; much unconscious self-deception; much erroneous inference due to ignorance of the almost infinitely complex psychical conditions involved. But it takes a very robust, or a very stupid, or a very ignorant scepticism to set it *all* down to delusion. That such multitudes of investigators, having no interest to serve but that of truth, should have *all* been mistaken in the belief—to which they have, in many cases, been compelled in spite of previous scepticism—that they have come into communication with discarnate intelligences, can with difficulty be credited. If you think differently, read the little work by the late Dr. A. R. Wallace, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, to which I referred in the Introduction, and perhaps you may see reason to alter your opinion.

Now all these communications, various and contradictory as they are in other respects, are at one in this. They confirm the fact of the existence of such an unseen

but actually existing world as Swedenborg describes. Speaking of Swedenborg's experiences only (as distinct from his other teaching), Mr. Myers wrote as follows in the work referred to above: "Speaking broadly, all this mass of matter, covering some hundreds of propositions, is in substantial accord with what has been given through the most trustworthy sensitives since Swedenborg's time."

To this we may fairly add the result, in many cases (not in all), of the investigations conducted by the Society for Psychic Research, a band of courageous scientific and literary men, who determined, about thirty years ago, in the face of much odium, and even personal detriment and discredit, to investigate by scientific methods the alleged occult phenomena which have played such a large and persistent part in the history of man. They resolved to investigate the subject impartially, and therefore without any foregone conclusion as to the issue. It is no secret that many if not most of them anticipated that when they had winnowed out the imposture, and delusion, and exaggerations, and accidental coincidences and assertions incapable of verification, there would be an extremely small residuum, if any. But their anticipation has been singularly falsified. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the majority of that Society, which includes many names eminent in science and literature, have become convinced of the existence of a world in which men continue to live after the death of their physical bodies.

The two fundamental conditions on which the credibility of Swedenborg's experiences as a report of real events rests, are thus attested by experiences, often mysterious, incomprehensible, apparently meaningless, but, as rare and occasional events, almost conterminous

with history. In every age of the world, in every period, alike in the most highly cultivated races and the most barbarous, have the beliefs maintained themselves, that there is an unseen world, and that it is possible for a man while living on earth to come into sensible contact with it. It is easy to discredit isolated instances of such alleged intercourse. But though the evidence for isolated instances may be weak, the mass of it is strong. There is a cumulative weight in a belief which has maintained itself, against the evidence of the bodily senses, so universally, under such various conditions. The value of circumstantial evidence rests on the conviction that it is impossible for a large number of independent lines of evidence to concur in pointing to one conclusion, unless that conclusion is true. Each indication considered separately may be inconclusive, but the cumulative weight of all is irresistible. May we not say the same of the evidence for the existence of an unseen world, and the possibility of man having intercourse with it?

On the other hand, one test of the truth of any theory which cannot be established by actual experience—and every truth must first enter the mind as a theory—is the number of detached and isolated facts which it brings into orderly and harmonious correlation. Swedenborg's doctrine of the spiritual world accounts in the simplest manner for those mysterious beliefs and experiences which have hitherto been regarded with suspicion because they were so sporadic, so little capable, as it seemed, of being ranged under any general laws. Considered in its most general aspect, it is corroborated by and corroborates a vast mass of human experience. More than this we ought not to expect. For Swedenborg's experience, if real, is unique in human history. No one

but he, at least in the Western world, has ever claimed to have been in constant, open intercourse with the unseen world for more than a quarter of a century, or to have been able to understand and record its constitution and laws. No one equipped with all the resources of the science and philosophy of his day, assimilated and systematised by an intellect of extraordinary power and breadth of view, has ever made such a claim.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONFLICT OF TRUTHS

THE existence of an unseen world, in close connection with the world in which we live, and inhabited by beings who have once been men living upon earth, is attested by a great mass of evidence. We may deny the conclusiveness of the evidence, but we cannot deny the evidence itself. Nor can any one, I think, who gives it candid and unprejudiced consideration, fail to be impressed by its abundance, continuity, and coherence. The difficulty we may feel in discovering any rational interpretation of the alleged facts ought not to tempt us to deny them, or regard them with that thoughtless incredulity which is often only the expression of a secret unwillingness to be convinced. History abounds in instances of things which had been declared impossible by those who seemed to be competent judges, being, nevertheless, found to be true. The evidence ought, at least, to keep our minds open to the possibility that there may, indeed, be "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy"; an aphorism we are apt to ignore in practice, however much we may admire it as a flight of poetic imagination.

But between the conception of an *unseen* world into which men pass at death, and the *spiritual* world depicted by Swedenborg, there is a wide difference. The one may be, and often is, conceived as a mere prolongation of earthly life, under different conditions; a transference by death into another and more interior

natural world. The other is a truly *spiritual* world; the development into its utmost potentialities of high or degraded, willing or unwilling service, of that capacity for the love of good and its correlative truths, or for the love of evil and its correlative falsities, one or other of which every man makes his own—makes indeed to be *himself*, his very nature—by his deliberate choice during his life on earth. The one is known (if we except some Oriental philosophies) chiefly as a series of isolated phenomena; serving, no doubt, a great use in preserving the belief, or perhaps only the suspicion, that this life is not all; but having little mutual interdependence in detail, and shedding little light on the great problems of human existence. The spiritual world described by Swedenborg is not only an ordered, consistent and harmonious whole; but throws a flood of light on those obscure but all-important elements of human nature out of which conduct springs. The knowledge of it is of practical use, and that of the highest kind.

But, besides this, the spiritual world depicted by Swedenborg is itself an element in a larger whole; a synthesis in which God, Creation, and Man may be seen in their true relations to each other. Before we proceed to discuss this aspect of his teaching, it will be well to see, in a general way, why a new synthesis is needed, and how it is to be effected.

Man comes into existence in the natural world. That world is about him from his infancy, fixed, permanent, apparently self-sustained and self-moved. The child never doubts that the external world exists independently of his sensations; nor that it is exactly like his sensations of it; nor (if he thinks at all on such a subject) that it would exist just the same if

there were no sentient being to be affected by it. The grown man thinks spontaneously and without reflection in the same way, even though he be of a philosophical turn of mind, and may have convinced himself of the slightness of the grounds on which these assumptions rest. Thus the first conscious action of the mind is on the sensuous plane; and this same plane of being chiefly engrosses its attention during adult life. By contact with the external world and by action on it, man's natural rationality and all its associated powers of memory, imagination, and so forth, are developed. As he advances in years these facts of sense undergo a constant process of analysis, comparison, and correlation, resulting in the accumulation of a great store of ordered knowledge, which is his "science"; differing not in kind, but only in inferiority of range, accuracy and minuteness from the more developed knowledges which we usually designate by that term.

But as the mind advances towards maturity, other knowledges of a different order disclose themselves; or rather detach themselves from the heterogeneous mass of information which has been gathered from teachers, books, and the world of nature. To the child, right and wrong are simply what he has been taught by parents and instructors that he ought or ought not to do. This teaching he accepts, willingly or unwillingly, as the case may be, but with little, if any, inward questioning. But as he approaches adult life, these matters present themselves under a different aspect. He begins to ask himself, if he does not ask his teachers, "What *are* right and wrong? What are their sanctions? How can I know what is right, and what is wrong? Why should I do what is called right, if I would rather do something else?" and other

questions like these. This is a period of perplexity and doubt, sometimes brief, sometimes protracted; sometimes passed through with comparative ease, sometimes with agonising struggle and perturbation, veritable earthquakes of the mind, in which all that has been deemed most solid and certain seems to shake and heave under the feet.

But in every mind, without exception, one thing at least is clear: "Right and wrong exist, and exist for me. I *ought* to strive after the one and to shun the other." This dictate is as indisputable as that of any bodily sensation. There may be a wide sphere of possible action in relation to which the existence of duty is obscure, or not perceived at all; but there is always a sphere in which it *is* seen by every man, if it is no more than that he ought not to steal, or to beat his wife, or to starve his children that he may have more to spend on drink.

This *sense* (as it is truly called) of right and wrong, being indisputable, shows that the mind has commenced the observation of a class of facts distinct from those in which it had been hitherto absorbed. And the facts are evidently cognised by a faculty of a different order from those which are employed in the study of the world of nature. It is a higher sense, dealing with higher objects.

Here comes the crisis of life to every man. His bodily senses see in the external world a self-sustaining order which he can manipulate to his own advantage so far as he can understand its constitution and laws by the exercise of his own powers, which seem to be self-derived. Conscience suggests a higher power, to whom allegiance is due. Bodily sense and the natural reason secretly animated by self-love, suggest,

"I am my own. I feel that I am. My existence is mine, to do as I like with." Conscience suggests, "I am not my own. I am the servant of a higher power. My duty is to be a willing servant; to make God's will mine."

Here we have the origin of the age-long—nay, the world-long—conflict between religion and science; of which we have witnessed only a unique development during the past century and a half, because the achievements of science, during that period, have been so unexampled, so unforeseen, so useful, and so revolutionary in the realm of thought. Is the antagonism fundamental and irreconcilable? It is fundamental, because it has its origin in the essential constitution of man, who is, by his very nature and the supreme ends for which he is brought into existence, subject to opposing influences, in the midst of which he stands and makes the choice which determines his eternal destiny. But the antagonism is not irreconcilable, for it exists, not in the nature of things, but in the nature of man.

Of the existence of this conflict there cannot be any question, nor that doubt and scepticism are always the result of a seeming or real discrepancy between science (in the wide sense defined above) and the teachings of religion. The conflict may be resolved in three different ways. A man may hold to his science, the information he derives from his senses and the conclusions he draws from it, and discard religion, except as a historical fact with which he feels no personal concern. Or he may hold to his science and hold to his religion too, treating them as totally independent spheres of thought and feeling. Or he may reach a point of view from which religion and science are seen

to accord; the one not only harmonising with, but illustrating and confirming, the other. This is a solution which religious minds to-day are seeking with eagerness and hope, feeling instinctively that it is their true goal and only final satisfaction. There are also indefinite varieties of each class, and indefinite combinations in the same mind of one solution with the others, the mind, in its fluctuations and vagaries of thought and feeling, at one time inclining to one solution or another, until it finally assumes, of necessity, a more or less confirmed station in one of them.

In thinking of these states of mind, as they actually exist in men, we must be careful to distinguish between that which is essential in each and that which may be accidental, temporary, or even merely nominal. We must not suppose that the theoretic agnostic, or even atheist, is always as destitute of religion as he professes himself to be. He may think that conscience is generated solely by the needs of society and the influence of environment, but, nevertheless, obey its dictates, not because he apprehends some detriment to himself if he acts otherwise, but because he sees that love, gentleness, justice, purity, and the service of others are *good*, and therefore strives to attain those virtues and to help others to attain them, as far as he can. He may be far less a real atheist than some assiduous frequenter of churches and zealot of ecclesiastical and devotional forms, whose profession of religion may be loud, and, as far as he knows, sincere. For outward religious observances may be little more than narcotics, enabling a man to forget God in his daily walk, which is essential atheism.

Nor should we fail to recognise the worth and beauty of character which are often found in men whose

habitual frame of mind ranks them in the second class, of whom Faraday was a conspicuous example. If it were not for the happy faculty which the mind possesses of believing inconsistent and contradictory things, many of the higher truths would perish out of it. Indeed there are, and I suppose always will be, problems in respect of which we all have to practise this inconsistency, or something that looks very much like it. For, however far we may have proceeded in the direction of the third solution, there will always be problems very imperfectly or not at all solved by it. These we must be content to leave unsolved for the present. For if we abandoned our religious, or, indeed, any other beliefs, in face of every unsolved difficulty, we should make no progress at all. Difficulties are the stumbling-blocks of the thoughtless but the beacons of the serious inquirer, for they show him where his knowledge is incomplete.

Yet the state of mind of this second class is always precarious. It is apt to be overwhelmed by a sudden insurgent uprush of the scientific faculty into the religious domain. The seeming peace is broken; war ensues, and too often the tangible certainties of science carry the day, at least for a time, against the ideal certainties of religion. Moreover, it is impotent to justify its position to another mind. The inward certainties on which it relies are incommunicable. It cannot give a reason for the hope that is in it. And it is daily becoming more difficult to maintain the position assumed by this class of mind. It is becoming increasingly clear to thoughtful men that the very maintenance of religion as the essential factor in the life of man, depends on the discovery of some synthesis which will unite it with science.

It is admitted, then, on all hands, that some new synthesis is necessary. It is also admitted, I think, that no satisfactory synthesis has yet been found. Why? Because there is no apparatus of thought by which the mind can frame definite ideas of God and of the modes of His action, or intelligently bridge over the gap which exists between its conceptions of God, such as they are, and its conceptions of nature. Now in the system of thought promulgated by Swedenborg these wants are supplied. At least such is its purport and aim. The spiritual world *is* the connecting link between God and nature, without some knowledge of which neither can be understood. For nothing on earth or in heaven can be understood except from the use it serves. Now the use of the natural world is that by means of it the spiritual world may be formed. Apart from the spiritual world, the natural world is unintelligible. Its uses for natural life can, indeed, be discerned, but its uses for spiritual life cannot, and these are its supreme uses.

The necessity of a synthesis being admitted, and its nature surmised, by what means can it be effected? The general principle underlying it may be expressed very simply and in few words. It consists in getting a new point of view; in learning to look at things from the centre or inmost, which is God, to the circumference or outmost, which is nature, and not contrariwise, as the mind, of itself, tends to do; in learning to think according to the Divine fact of things, which proceed in this order from their source; in a word, in learning to look at all facts, in some measure, from the Divine standpoint; as God looks at them.

Here, I dare say, my reader will pause. It is well that he should. "Arrogance!" he may feel inclined

to exclaim; perhaps "Impiety!" But do not hastily charge this teacher with these grave spiritual misdemeanours. Wait at least till you have listened to and well pondered what he has to tell you. The assurance of humility often looks very much like the assurance of arrogance; is, indeed, often indistinguishable from it by mortal eyes. Does not the whole fabric of religion rest on the fact (or assumption, if you will), that man is able to learn, by slow degrees, by constant effort, to love, think, and act like God, by power derived from Him?

The foundation of Swedenborg's teaching, and of all Christian teaching worthy of the name, is that the human mind is an organ capable of grasping, designed to grasp, finding its true function in grasping the highest facts, even the nature and purposes of God; not perfectly, for the finite cannot comprehend the Infinite, but in a manner adequate to its own needs and destiny, though inadequate, even infinitely inadequate, to the being of God Himself.

The teachings of Swedenborg, far from being the dreamy musings of an amiable visionary, which, I imagine, is the common notion about them, are a logical, coherent effort to reverse the order which the mind, if left to itself, is disposed to follow in thinking on Divine and spiritual subjects, which is, to bring them to the bar of natural reason, and there, and by its canons, to judge them. If these teachings are accepted, they must gradually, almost imperceptibly, perhaps, effect a revolution in men's thoughts about everything Divine and human, and even about physical things regarded from the ontological point of view, as complete as that which was wrought by the discovery by Copernicus of the centrality of the sun in the solar

system in men's conceptions of that system, and of the whole starry universe beyond it. That discovery resulted from the astronomer having mentally placed himself in the sun. From that ideal standpoint the motions of the sun, moon, planets and stars, as seen from the earth, presented a totally different appearance. He did not need to question, still less deny, any phenomenon visible from the earth. Every such fact was, indeed, necessary to his theory. But all the facts became susceptible of a new, a simpler, a more consistent and comprehensive explanation. He had escaped from the little earth, with its little lights circling round it, into the illimitable stellar universe, by looking at the familiar facts from a new point of view.

It must not be supposed that such a complete reversal of our natural, spontaneous modes of thought is announced by Swedenborg himself as his aim. In his sober pages there is no talk of revolutions, mental or otherwise. He goes quietly about his work, and leaves the results to speak for themselves. The revolution which he effects is a silent and unperceived one, as most of the great and enduring revolutions are. It is only when we look back and see where we were, and where we are, that we perceive that we have come into a world in which "all things are new," even the most familiar. To any one who has drunk deeply of Swedenborg's teaching the description I have given of its total effect on the mind will not seem exaggerated.

CHAPTER IX

SCIENCE AND EXPLANATION

It was stated in the last chapter that Swedenborg's method consists in a reversal of the process by which the human mind is prone to form its judgments concerning spiritual and Divine things, namely, by means of knowledge acquired through the senses; and in enabling it to think of all things, spiritual and natural, as emanating from the Divine; and that there is always an apparent and generally a real contrariety between a man's "science," or the definite, co-ordinated experience of the external world and of himself which he gains through his bodily senses and his own reflections, and the postulates and demands of his religion. That this contrariety does exist in every man in some form, at some stage of his spiritual career, and, more or less persistently, throughout it—if he thinks at all seriously about religious matters—will not, I imagine, be disputed by any one, whether he regard religion as the essentially human element in the life of man, or as a collection of indefinitely variable conceptions having scarcely anything in common but this, that they are all equally baseless.

Before proceeding to consider this method in detail, it will be well to give somewhat closer attention to that "science" which is held to be the chief intellectual opponent of religion. The inherent weaknesses and inconsistencies of various religious doctrines have been often exposed with no gentle hand; but these did not

generally involve any fundamental religious position; the outworks only were assailed in these attacks. Many people in the present day hold that science has rendered the citadel itself—belief in God—untenable.

It is important, therefore, that, in contesting this conclusion, we should form a clear conception of what science really is; that is, of the nature and limits of certainty; for this alone is entitled to be called science, or absolute, unquestionable knowledge. Much of what passes current as science is more or less plausible conjecture, the plausibility of which depends largely on the assumptions from which the theorist starts. These hypotheses may be perfectly legitimate, as the working apparatus of thought. So far as they are tentative theories of how things which are not discernible by the senses actually happen, or about what happened in the past—using the known to explain the unknown—they have no more anti-religious tendency than the known facts on which they are founded, though they may easily come into conflict with other theories, essentially of the same order as themselves, which have been advanced in the name of religion. But scientific hypotheses which belong properly to the domain of philosophy or explanation are often put forward with all the confidence which attaches to science itself, and in many minds are confounded with it. We need, therefore, to draw a clear line of demarcation between all theories, however generally accepted they may be, and the indubitable facts which properly constitute science.

It is universally admitted theoretically, however much the admission may be ignored in practice, that the only absolutely certain knowledge which any man has, or can have, is of his own states of consciousness.

These states of consciousness are to him indisputable facts, whether they be sensations of external objects, which he can verify, or repeat at will, or emotions and thoughts independent of external objects, imaginations, dreams, or hallucinations, or memories of such experiences. These states of consciousness constitute his existence as he knows it. From memory he derives the conviction of the persistence of his personality under all the manifold and incessant changes it undergoes. These two things, persistent personality which knows, and sensations (in the widest sense) which are known, form to the mind in which they occur, or rather which they constitute, a body of absolutely certain knowledge—science strictly so called.

Directly we attempt to pass beyond this sphere of consciousness, an element of uncertainty creeps in. Consciousness consists of two connected but distinct series of phenomena; one of which appears to have an origin external to ourselves, while the other appears to have an internal origin. Mr. Herbert Spencer has aptly compared the field of consciousness to an endless moving band, composed of two distinct longitudinal parts, the width of which varies indefinitely in relation to the total width. At one moment outward objects so completely engross our attention that the internal series is reduced almost to a line. At another we are so absorbed by the internal series that the sense of outward objects almost completely disappears, until something occurs to rouse us from our "brown study" and make us attend to what is happening around us.

The common habit of mankind is to treat this division in consciousness as proving the fact of two different origins of consciousness; one in a world existing external to and independent of our sensitive faculties,

and the other in our own minds. The philosopher, when he is not meditating on the metaphysics of the matter, unhesitatingly assumes, like the unreflecting boor, that the external world exists, apart from his sensations, exactly as his sensations present it to him. He feels as if his sight travelled outside of himself in some magic way, and sensated objects at a distance. When he touches an object with his hand, he does not doubt that he feels the contact in his hand. But here science itself steps in, and assures us that these are illusions. All these sensations exist in the brain, itself, of course, a part of the apparently external world. Now the basis of sensation in the brain must be (on any hypothesis which involves the existence of an external world independent of sensation) some modification of its molecular or other structure, due to the impact of stimuli received through the organs of sense. If, therefore, such modification were effected, without any external stimulus, we should have a sensation of an external world just as vivid and indubitably real as we have by the process of sensation as commonly conceived. This is, in fact, one of the bases of Idealism. There is no need to attempt here any justification of that philosophical position, which insists that all that we know is mind, and that there is nothing gained in clearness or consistency by postulating some extra-mental entity called matter; but it may be said with confidence that ever since the time of Berkeley it has been established as a possible explanation of the facts of nature, and is, indeed, held—at least, as the best available working hypothesis—by a large and increasing school of psychologists throughout the world. It is sufficient here to point out that as soon as we pass beyond sensation, in the strictest sense, and postulate

an external world, independent of our sensations, we pass beyond absolute certainty into a region where a possible alternative has to be recognised.

So with the relation of antecedents and consequents in nature. Every one, in his unreflecting thoughts, assumes that this relation indicates a real causal connection. But here criticism steps in and assures him that he is mistaken, or, at least, is assuming something that is unproved and unprovable. When he has witnessed a given sequence of phenomena many times, it takes its place in the order of nature as he conceives it. He looks for its recurrence with confidence, and that confidence is constantly justified by the event. But the notion that when he observes it for the thousandth time he knows any more about the cause of the sequence than he did at first, is fallacious. He has become familiar with it, that is all. What it is that connects phenomena together in an invariable order is an absolute mystery. Nor do we in the least get rid of this mystery by analysing any apparently simple phenomenon into any number of sub-phenomena in which a similar order is found to reign. The cause which connects each one of these with its antecedents and consequents is equally inscrutable. The assumption that there is a true causal *nexus* between the antecedents and consequents of nature is good for practical purposes, just as the assumption that the sun and stars revolve round the motionless earth is good for many practical purposes. But it is an assumption, not a certainty, and may be no more absolutely true than the apparent diurnal motion of the heavenly bodies is. For an order of causation may be conceived which would be compatible with the observed facts of sequence, and in which the juxtaposition of

natural phenomena in an invariable order would indicate no direct causal connection between them.

Scientific facts have, therefore, no explanation in themselves. We must bring our explanation to them, derive it from some source outside them. That is, we necessarily approach the interpretation or explanation of facts from some more or less definite standpoint or assumption which colours, and often dictates, all our ontological inferences from or explanations of them. Scientific facts, pure and simple, neither oppose nor sustain religion. They are neutral. It is the explanation or interpretation of them which may be religious or anti-religious; and no greater *scientific* certainty can be claimed for one explanation than for the other. All are alike extra-scientific. It is philosophy or explanation alone that can assail religion, and that can defend it.

What is it that we mean by philosophy or explanation? That there is some explanation of the facts of life, we are bound to assume. But what is it that really *explains*, makes facts intelligible, interprets them? No fact is explained by the mere circumstance that it has been witnessed a great number of times, though the thoughtless are apt to suppose that it is, and to assume that what is familiar is understood. Nothing is explained by any "law" which is merely a generalisation from observed facts. Is there, then, nothing that explains? Nothing that can render the universe intelligible to us? Yes, there is one thing, and one thing only, and that is a perception of its uses.

Take any instrument, a knife, a violin, a watch, a telescope, or any machine; its explanation is its use. Take any organ of the body, internal or external, the hand, the eye, the brain, the heart; its explanation is

its use. That which is not of use in the human economy (if such organ there be) is regarded as alien to the body, and is on the high road to extinction. Take any operation, a surgeon or mechanic at his work; its explanation is its use. Take any institution, any study, any occupation, professional or mercantile; its explanation is its use. Games and amusements, which seem to have no direct use, if they are defended—and we all feel that they are defensible—can be defended only on the ground that they are of some use, as recreation and refreshment. Even those intangible things to which it is most difficult to assign a definite use—beauty, music, art—we, nevertheless, dimly feel must have some use beyond the mere giving of pleasure. There is a purifying power in the beauties of nature. There is an art that elevates and an art that degrades. Here, too, if we are to really *understand* the things, we must perceive their uses. Without this they are unaccountable excrescences on human life. If there are some things in nature to which we find it impossible to assign any use, they thereby become inexplicable. The discovery of an adequate use would explain them.

Is it not obvious that the principle, that use and use alone explains, is applicable to the whole wide field of human life? What makes moral and physical evil unintelligible—irreconcilable, to many minds, with the doctrine of a God of love, or even of a God at all—but the inability to perceive any use in them? If we could perceive an adequate use in them, they would be no more inexplicable than is a surgical operation, which to an uninstructed eye might look like an act of barbarous cruelty, as soon as its motive and end are understood. An adequate use will explain anything, however useless, or even contrary to use, it may appear

at first sight to be. Inexplicability is nothing but the absence of any perception of an adequate use.

The world of nature is so packed with uses that thousands of men are engaged daily in investigating her processes, with the confident expectation that if they succeed in discovering something new about them, that something will ultimately, if not at once, be found to be of use. The use may lie latent and unperceived for ages, like steam power in the boiling of kettles and saucepans, or electricity in the property of amber when rubbed, of attracting bits of paper, until suddenly, in the hands of a Watt or a Faraday, the use emerges, and, perhaps, ushers in a new age.

Now uses involve intelligence as their source. What but intelligence can produce uses? The idea that this wonderful world of order and of use was developed from unintelligent, merely mechanical forces, is the very nadir of human irrationality, and has been practically abandoned by all thoughtful people. Even Haeckel is compelled to postulate in every atom of that primordial stuff, out of which the stars and planets and all they contain have been evolved, something of the nature of will and intelligence.

The argument for the existence of God from the innumerable uses which we find in nature may be regarded as a development of the argument from design, which was so much pursued by Christian apologists about the middle of the last century. That argument has, of late years, fallen into discredit, partly because the theory of evolution has seemed to account for the adaptation of organ to environment without importing into the process the idea of a guiding intelligence; but also, I think, because the argument, in the form in which it was formerly urged, is felt to

be incongruous with that larger, grander idea of God to which religious minds everywhere are now aspiring. It shocks our reverence to think of God as designing a joint or other organ, as an inventor designs a machine. But against the argument from the universality of uses no such objection arises; for the love of being useful, as an end in itself, is identical with goodness. It is essential beneficence. What is a good man but one who intends, and, as far as he can, accomplishes uses, not for the sake of some benefit resulting to himself, but for the sake of the uses themselves? We can form no higher idea of God than as a Being who infinitely intends, designs, and accomplishes eternal uses; who is, indeed, Himself essential Use, from whom all subsidiary uses flow as from their source.

What is it, then, that essentially constitutes active, productive, human use? There are three elements in it, the motive, which is the love of use or of doing good; the means, which are wisdom, a perception of the modes in which use can be accomplished; and action, the effect of these, which is the completed and substantiated use. Use is never perfect unless these three things are conjoined in it. It is true that uses are often wrought by men from other motives than a genuine, that is, a disinterested love of use. But though such uses may be beneficial to society, they are not beneficial to the man who produces them, except so far as they contribute to the attainment of the ends he really regards in them—his own interest, his own exaltation, or something of that nature. They do not tend to develop in him that life of conjoined love, wisdom, and use, which is the truly human life because it has its origin and source in the Divine.

The God whom we seek, therefore, the knowledge

of whom will be the sufficient explanation of all the problems of life, is a God of essential, infinite, eternal, unchangeable love, wisdom and use ; for this is perfect goodness. Can we find Him? Can we know Him? If we can, all the deepest questions and needs of the human heart and intellect will be satisfied. If we cannot, in some measure, know God, know what He is, what He intends, and that He intends nothing but eternal uses, religion, whatever else it may be, can be no explanation, no illuminating interpretation of the facts of life.

CHAPTER X

THE UNKNOWN GOD

When the earth and her satellites, the sun, moon, planets, and stars, were supposed to constitute the universe, it was not difficult to think of God as a Being in human shape, dwelling in a place called heaven, somewhere beyond the crystal vault of the sky, and ruling the kingdoms of the earth by His edicts and emissaries, much as an autocratic monarch governs his dominions. Copernicus, in making his discovery that the sun and not the earth was the centre of the solar system, thought only of a more simple and credible explanation of natural phenomena. But the unforeseen consequences of his discovery have been, as so often happens, vastly more important than those he directly contemplated. Its effect on thought about God has been revolutionary; and the more recent discoveries of astronomy and physical science have tended strongly in the same direction. Indeed, if we could read clearly the inner life and thought of humanity, that which essentially constitutes its progress and development, we should, perhaps, find that all the astonishing achievements of science in modern times pale into insignificance before this, that they have impelled, and, as it were, compelled the human mind to seek for a more adequate conception of God than that which satisfied it in the past.

The effect appears to many—perhaps to us all, in one stage or other of our spiritual career—merely destructive. The conception of God in the Christian world,

and, if we except Pantheism and some other mysticisms, in the world outside it, has been that of a personal Being, existing locally in some portion of the universe of space. His omnipresence was, indeed, postulated; but this was, apparently, little more than a term, which conveyed no distinct meaning. If it meant anything, it meant action by Him at a distance; that is, on things wholly separated from Himself; an idea which rational thought rejects as unthinkable. In the present day, religious thought about God vacillates between the old conception of a Divine Human Being, somewhere locally existent and visible, though He is at the same time omnipresent in a sense which is undefined, and the conception of some inscrutable *Ens universi* which is absolutely inconceivable by the human mind, the "Infinite and Eternal Energy" of Herbert Spencer, a God who is wholly unknowable.

It is true that many thinkers who belong theoretically to this school do not rigidly adhere to this doctrine of total nescience. Thus we have Matthew Arnold's "power not ourselves which makes for righteousness"; a definition which contains at least three predicates. Sir Henry Thompson, in his little work entitled *The Unknown God,* expressed his deep conviction that the unknown God is "beneficent." The sarcasm has been levelled against Herbert Spencer that he knew a great deal about the Unknowable. These inconsistencies are not, however, the proper objects of sarcasm. They ought to be welcomed and approved. They are the natural recoil of the mind from a no-conception which would deprive thought about God of every idea except that of mere existence. How can a man love, reverence, or think to any purpose of a Being of whom he can form no conception? God, under this system of negation,

becomes a mere unknown *x*. The higher instincts of man's nature, which impel him towards goodness, purity, usefulness, integrity, are deprived of all support, except in his own private opinion and choice, and the collective opinion and choice of the community. He does not know, when he is painfully striving to attain these virtues and to repress in himself the impulses of selfishness or lust, whether the Being from whom he and all other things derive their existence will approve and aid him in his struggle ; nor even whether He knows, or, if He knows, cares anything about it. The very ideas of approval and aid are anthropomorphic, and must be ruled out as inadmissible. To pray to such a Being would be absurd. An unknowable God is, for practical purposes, so far as man is concerned, no God at all.

On what ground is this abrogation of all definite ideas of God demanded? On grounds, I think, as shallow and inconsequent as have ever been offered to the mind as reasons for distrusting its own highest powers. Let us briefly review them.

The human mind inevitably seeks a cause for every phenomenon it perceives. It matters not how this thirst for cause was generated. It is there. It is the source of every inquiry which the mind institutes. Now the mind cannot proceed a step without the assumption that its conclusions are valid, or may become so progressively. If it is irresistibly impelled to seek for cause, there must be a cause or causes discoverable by human reason. To suppose otherwise would be to reduce it to mere impotence.

The mind, in its search for cause, is reduced to a selection between two alternatives. It may assume that the common belief that the invariable sequence of phenomena in nature indicates a true causal *nexus*

between them—good for practical purposes, but unprovable—is true ; or it may assume that this invariable sequence is the expression in the physical world of some invisible order, a sphere of being beyond the reach of the bodily senses, or of any method, mathematical or other, by which natural facts can be investigated. But neither of these assumptions affords any final solution. In either case we are led to an infinite recession of causes. If, for instance, we assume a true causal *nexus* between phenomena, and are led to infer that the universe, as we know it, including mind, has originated by natural processes from a tenuous gas diffused through space, we are no nearer a solution of cause than we were before. We have still to ask, "How came this gas, containing potentially all the things which have been evolved from it, to exist?" If, on the other hand, we assume that the visible universe is the expression, in the physical order, of an interior, invisible world which is its cause, here, also, there is no solution. For we are compelled to ask, "What was the cause of that invisible world?" And if we find an answer, then we must ask, "What was the cause of that cause?" and so on *ad infinitum*. In consecutive causes, whether we conceive them as, so to speak, laterally or vertically connected, there is no solution. The materialistic no less than the religious philosopher is compelled to postulate a final, self-existent, eternal cause, which contains within itself, in potency, all the effects which have flowed from it. And, by common consent, that cause must be regarded as infinite. For, if it were finite, there would be something from which it was excluded as cause. Consequently the solution would fail, and the whole problem would have to be faced again. But as the First Cause is infinite and the human mind is finite, there is an infinite disparity

between them; and it would appear that any idea of the First Cause which the mind can form must be untrue. So we are landed in the conception—if conception it can be called—of a First Cause that is unknown and unknowable.

There would be some excuse for this conclusion if it were maintained or maintainable, that we have adequate, that is, exhaustively true ideas of anything. But the very philosophers who propound the inability of the human mind to form any true idea of God, admit, and even insist on, the "relativity" of *all* knowledge. They must admit it, because, on their own showing, every particular fact merges at last in the infinite from which it sprang. At that point, therefore, the ideas the mind can form of any natural object must become inadequate. But we do not need this theoretic basis for the belief that all our ideas even of physical objects are inadequate to the total facts. For the history of science has been the gradual substitution of relatively more adequate for less adequate ideas about natural things; and there seems no likelihood that the process of correction will ever cease. It would seem, indeed, that infinite knowledge would be needed to make us know the simplest natural object completely. Tennyson recognised this when he wrote:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies,
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God, and man is.

Our intercourse with our fellow-men, also, may convince us that our knowledge even of the things around us which are most vital to our welfare is very imperfect.

Do you really know the person you love best in the world? You know something about him or her. You think, perhaps, that your knowledge is more extensive and accurate than it really is. But the man who most plumes himself on his insight into character will hardly maintain that he has a complete and exhaustive knowledge of any one—even of himself. The plain fact is that we think on all subjects by means of a system of symbols or appearances, which, whether they be of things or persons, are very inadequate representations of the objects they reflect. But are they therefore valueless? Are they therefore untrue? Can we dispense with them? We can learn to know both things and people better and so assume truer and better relations with them. What more do we want, or can we have? To demand more is, in effect, to demand infinite knowledge. The highest knowledge attainable by finite minds is necessarily progressive. The glory of the human mind is that it can progress, and is not bounded by any assignable limit; and the necessary correlative of this indefinite possible advance is that it can make mistakes, and find out that it has made them. Why may not this be true of our conceptions of the First Cause? Why may it not be possible for the human mind to form ideas of God which are progressively more and more true, although from the disparity between the infinite and the finite they can never be adequate or exhaustive? Why may not the recognition of this inadequacy stimulate the search for greater relative adequacy, just as the sense of the inadequacy and incompleteness of our knowledge of nature stimulates scientific inquiry, and thus leads to a progressive knowledge of that which can never be completely known?

The notion that the inadequacy of man's conceptions

of God precludes true thinking about Him, would, if it were impartially applied, condemn *all* thought as necessarily misleading, and so land us in intellectual impotence.

But if we are content to think of God, as we think of all other objects, by means of symbols which are admittedly inadequate, but which can be made progressively less and less inadequate, the question arises as to where we ought to look for such symbols. Let us see if nature offers us any suggestion of an answer. For we are now seeking a basis for definite religious ideas—which are necessarily grounded in the conceptions we form of God—in universally accepted facts.

Visible nature is divided into three kingdoms, the mineral, the vegetable, and the animal. The broad distinctions by which they are characterised are manifest. The mineral is inert, mechanical; the vegetable is organic and living; the animal is psychic, possessing will and intelligence. A functional distinction differentiates each kingdom from the one immediately below it. But this new function is not independent and self-contained; it is superadded to the function of the lower kingdom, and rules it.

Without the mineral kingdom the vegetable kingdom could not exist; and every vegetable contains the mineral, suspended in and manipulated by it. The material atoms no longer lie inert and incapable of independent motion; or assume a rigid position in relation to one another, as in crystallisation, but seem to be endowed with intelligence; and move, like units of a well-disciplined army, to their destined posts, from which they retire only when their work is accomplished. Evidently a higher grade of being than the merely mineral, and which uses the mineral as its instrument.

So the animal kingdom is, as a whole and in each particular animal, superimposed on the vegetable. Without the latter no animal could exist; and in each animal the vegetable function is embodied as an essential constituent of its life; but there is added an element of conscious will and intelligence which the vegetable does not possess. All the unconscious processes by which the body of an animal is formed and maintained—its growth from the ovum to the fully developed creature, the circulation of the blood, digestion, assimilation, breathing—may be considered physiologically as higher forms of vegetable, rather than as animal functions. The distinctive mark of the animal is in those higher nervous centres by which the conscious choice of ends and means is rendered possible. If in man there is a still higher psychological element introduced—a capacity for the love of unselfish and impersonal good, good as an end to be pursued for its own sake, apart from any interested motive, and along with this a capacity for the apprehension of truth, as the means by which genuine good can be attained—evidently this faculty is superinduced on the merely animal nature in him. No one doubts that man, as to a part of his mind, is of the same nature as the higher animals. His bodily organs, sensations, and desires, and many of his mental operations are like theirs. But he has also something in his nature which is distinct from this animal nature; which can look down on it, as from a superior elevation, can judge it unworthy, and resist its impulses.

It is clear that each of these kingdoms can be truly thought of only by means of that which is highest and distinctive in its components. In other words, the symbols by which alone we can think of these kingdoms must be founded on the characteristic qualities of each,

not on the qualities of the lower elements which they contain, use, and dominate. If we refuse to follow this dictate of common sense, we shall inevitably merge the human in the animal, the animal in the vegetable, and the vegetable in the mineral.

From these considerations we may derive this principle: everything in nature must be thought of by means of that which is highest, distinctive, constitutive in it. Here we have an answer to the question we are considering, "Where may we find the symbols which will most adequately represent to our minds the Divine and Infinite?" We shall find them in the highest forms of our experience; that is, in human nature itself at its best. For this has come forth from the First and self-existing Cause. That Cause must, therefore, contain such things. It may contain them in forms infinitely greater and purer than anything we can conceive; but like things, at least, it must contain, for there can be nothing in the stream which was not in the source.

It may seem superfluous to labour this point; and it would be so but for the fact, that the devotees of an "unknowable" First Cause pursue a directly contrary method. They discard from their thought all the ideas derived from distinctively human experience as "anthropomorphic"; and by parity of reason they will naturally discard ideas derived from the contemplation of specifically animal or vegetable life; and then they get landed in the lowest of all, the purely mechanical, mineral order of existence. And as this is manifestly insufficient *per se* to account for all the phenomena of life, they arrive, by another route, at the assumption of the absolutely unknown. But if we are content to be taught by Nature, we should be led to infer, first, that the order of causation, at least, above the mineral, is to

be conceived rather as vertical than lateral; next to seek the proximate link in the order of causation above the human as at present known to us, in a sphere of being as much elevated above it as the human is above the animal, or the animal above the vegetable, or the vegetable above the mineral, but governing and regulating the human, as the human does the animal, the animal the vegetable, and the vegetable the mineral, in some mode which it may be as impossible for us in our present state to apprehend clearly, as it is for an animal to picture to itself the processes of the human mind.

We shall not approach the Divine and Infinite by eliminating from our thought the ideas of love, wisdom, purpose, which are derived from our higher human experience. We shall by so doing degrade our thought to something immeasurably lower. Rather will the truth lie in the other direction; in intensifying and raising to the highest power all that we can conceive of purest and best in the actualities and possibilities of human nature; but remembering always that they are but symbols; the best we can attain to-day, adequate to our needs to-day, but not, perhaps, the best we can attain to-morrow, not adequate to our needs then.

There is, therefore, a fundamental religious truth in the doctrine of an unknowable God. If we forgot it, we should fall into the delusion that the symbols by which alone we can think of God are adequate representations of His nature. But His infinity by no means precludes a relative and progressive knowledge of His nature and purposes, which is all we need.

CHAPTER XI

THE DIVINE HUMANITY

SOME of the more reverent thinkers who maintain that God is unknowable acquiesce in the necessity of adopting an anthropomorphic symbolism in thinking about Him. Thus Sir Henry Thompson, in the *Unknown God*, attributed to the "Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed," infinite power and knowledge and also beneficence. In a note on a passage in which he discussed the "Tendencies, Disposition or Purpose of the unknown Source from which all things proceed," he added, "Applying these terms as we should to the action of human beings, an analogy which must be *permitted to man's limited means of expression*" (p. 59). But why must it be permitted? If the analogy is false it ought not to be permitted. If it is true it ought not merely to be permitted, but to be enforced, developed, elaborated; because, if we have reason to believe that the Infinite and Eternal Being from whom all things have their existence is beneficent and wise, it cannot be beyond our power to see, in some measure, how He is beneficent and wise. In fact, no one could have any valid reason for believing Him to be beneficent and wise unless he had reached some conception of how His beneficence and wisdom are shown. And if *any* knowledge on this subject, even the most general, is attainable, it would be irrational to deny that it can be extended, become more precise and particular in its contents. For all

knowledge consists of a progressive advance from general to particular facts.

Let us look at the question fairly and seriously, for we have now before us the central problem of all religion. All religious thought necessarily seeks to form ideas of God by means of symbols derived from the highest human qualities it is able to conceive. All reverent religious thought admits that the symbols are inadequate representations of the realities which they dimly and imperfectly portray, but maintains that the symbols, inadequate as they are, do represent a reality, and are capable of being purified and elevated indefinitely, so as to represent it better. Clearly, in this mode of thought, there is a postulate involved, namely, that God *possesses* in infinite perfection those qualities, the ideas of which we derive from the highest possibilities we can conceive of human excellence. All our thinking in human symbols is baseless and misleading unless God is Himself Divinely Human.

This necessary postulate is stated as a fact by Swedenborg, with uncompromising and startling simplicity. "God," he says, "is a Man." Not man, not collective or individual humanity in its highest attainable spiritual development in this world or the next. This, indeed, is *from* God. In a very real sense, it *is* God. His actual, immediate, living presence with man constitutes true manhood. But God is not defined or limited by that manifestation. He is, in Himself, apart from and independent of all derivative being, an Infinite and Divine Man.

Swedenborg does not intend this statement to be interpreted in any figurative or otherwise indefinite sense; for he adds, "Because God is a Man, He has a body, and everything belonging to the body; con-

sequently He has a face, a breast, an abdomen, loins, feet; for apart from these He would not be a Man. And having these He has also eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, tongue, and further, the organs which are within a man, as the heart and the lungs, and the parts which depend on these, all of which, taken together, make a man to be a man. In created man these parts are many and, regarded in their structures, innumerable; but in God-Man they are infinite, nothing being wanting, and therefore to Him belongs infinite perfection."

I well remember the kind of mental start, the shock of incredulity and even repugnance with which I first read the words, "God is a Man." Probably they will affect my readers, if they are unfamiliar with Swedenborg's teaching, in much the same way. But do not, I beseech you, let this first impression deter you from examining the statement calmly. Needless to say it is not to be interpreted in any physical sense. The human body derives its form from the mind which animates it;

For soul is form and doth the body make.

It corresponds to mind, not only as a whole, but in every minutest part, internal and external; it is a physical model of mind; and mind is as truly substance, as truly organic, therefore as truly a body, as the physical body is. The mind of man is that which can become an image and likeness of God, who is the creator and sustainer of all derivative substances and forms.

This explanation will not, I dare say, remove the feeling of incongruity and even absurdity which the statement is apt to occasion. Let us try then to see

exactly where the difficulty arises. For a difficulty is often half solved as soon as its precise nature is discovered. There are two terms to the proposition. In one or other of them the origin of the apparent incongruity must lie.

We have seen that, if we think at all about God, we must do so by means of symbols derived from the highest human experience, or we not only fail to account for the universe as a whole, spiritual as well as physical, but inevitably fall into a far lower conception —not less derived from human experience—the merely psychic, the merely living, or the merely material. But if these conceptions derived from human experience do not correspond with reality; if God does not possess the attributes by which we are compelled to think of Him, all these conceptions are not only imperfect and inadequate, but radically false. They are not even approximations to the truth. It is admitted that they can be nothing more than approximations, imperfect symbols; that the reality is infinitely beyond any conception we can form. But if God is not Divinely Human in His nature, are we not obliged to conclude that there is a fundamental, irreconcilable antinomy in the constitution of the human mind; that the Power from whom all things have proceeded has so constructed it that it *must* think about Him and *must* think about Him falsely? No one can willingly entertain such a belief. Every system of thought, whatever it may be, is necessarily built on the assumption that the processes of the human mind are valid; that what it must think it ought to think, and is, at least, an approximate symbol or representation of a fact. If we doubt this, the grounds upon which we believe any philosophical, ethical, or spiritual truth are undermined.

Let us, then, briefly review the steps by which we have been led to the assumption we are discussing, that God must possess attributes corresponding to, though infinitely transcending, the highest forms of human faculty. They consist of a series of propositions each of which contains a statement of fact. One fact mis-stated would vitiate the conclusion, for a chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The series may be stated as follows :

1. We cannot but postulate a First and self-existent Cause.
2. We can only think by means of symbols drawn from human experience.
3. There are higher and lower elements in human experience.
4. Everything must be thought of by means of that which is highest and distinctive in it.
5. That which is highest and distinctive in human experience must have its origin and analogue in the First Cause.
6. Therefore we must think of the First Cause in terms of the highest human experience.

Obviously there is no necessary cogency in any one of these propositions, such as exists in a correctly worked sum in arithmetic or the demonstration of a mathematical problem. I think we may say that the conclusion is inevitable if the premises are admitted to be true ; but each of the premises may be denied. A man may say, " I feel no need whatever to think about a First Cause. I take things as I find them, and consider it waste of time to speculate about how they came to be what they are." This attitude of mind is represented, I imagine, by a large class in the present day. Essentially they do

not care about religion, at all events as a system of thought prescribing conduct. It would be a false inference to assume that they are therefore wholly irreligious. It is a state of mind that may find its lodgment very easily in a more or less perfunctory, hereditary attachment to the Roman Catholic, or, indeed, any other Church, or no Church at all; and in any one of these spheres it may be consistent with a very honest, wholesome life, full of practical usefulness and human kindness, but troubling itself little or not at all about explanations of any kind. It is one of the indications of Swedenborg's rare sanity and insight, that he has, in his writings, done full justice to this class of mind, so utterly unlike his own; so indisposed by apathy to examine, even, the system of religious thought which he believed it was his mission to give to the world. We must not forget, however, that this class of mind has its dark side. There are those who *do not care* because the ideals and demands of religion are repugnant to them. They want to be left uncurbed in their enjoyment of life, and religion presents itself to them as a curb, with its inexorable "Thou shalt not."

But about minds of this order we need not concern ourselves, whether they belong to the better or worse section in it. If they ever glanced at this book they will have thrown it aside long ere now. Every reader who has accompanied us so far will probably be able to say to himself, without the least hesitation, "I do not know whether others *must* think about a First Cause. I know that *I* must." This is all we need. We have not to judge for other people, but for ourselves. It is sufficient that *we* feel the necessity, the unescapable necessity of thinking about a First Cause.

Assuming, then, that No. 1 is admitted, it seems

incontestable that we can only think of the First Cause in terms of human experience. That there are higher and lower elements in human experience is contestable only on the ground that there is no such distinction as right and wrong, that there is no such thing as unselfishness, that those who profess to be striving after goodness and say they find it very difficult of attainment are in reality as much under the influence of self-love as the man who avowedly gives all his passions full play, regardless of the consequences to himself or to others. If a man professes this as his belief, it is impossible to convict him of error. It is a question of seeing or not seeing certain distinctions. But I do not believe that any man can honestly believe this, unless, perhaps, in that last perversion of the mind when evil has become its good, and good its evil. But with this denial we need not concern ourselves. It is, happily, very rare.

About the statement that everything must be thought of by means of that which is highest and distinctive in it, I can imagine there may be some hesitation. But I believe that the more it is thought about the more clearly will it be seen to be a universal law of thought. All our sensuous apprehensions are necessarily based on distinctions; all our thoughts about things civil, moral and spiritual. We cannot see except by distinctions of colour. We cannot feel except by means of differences of muscular strain, heat or cold, rough or smooth, hard or soft. No one doubts that all the motions of the human body are mechanical; yet considered as mere mechanics they are inexplicable and meaningless. We interpret them in terms derived from our own will, intelligence and consequent action. If man has some element in him which allies him with the Divine, which enables him to become in some real sense godly or god-like,

shall we not fatally misconceive his nature unless we make this the predominant element in our thought about him?

I do not think that the statement that that which is highest and distinctive in human experience must have its origin and analogue in the First Cause is likely to be contested by any one whose assent has been given to the preceding propositions. A doubt may present itself whether, if the principle be true, it does not compel us to think that what is lowest in human nature as well as what is highest and even what is evil, has some analogue in the First Cause. It is an essential element in Swedenborg's teaching that that which is lowest in nature, namely, the physical and mechanical, *has* its analogue in God. The whole doctrine of correspondence rests on this fact. The removal of the doubt about evil also having its analogue depends on our understanding and acceptance of the doctrine, peculiar, I think, to Swedenborg's teaching, that evil is nothing but the perversion of good through the action of human free will.

Let us now turn to the other term of the proposition, "God is a Man." Perhaps the difficulty we are considering lies in our imperfect conception of what man is, or, at least, of what Swedenborg means by man. The word is often on our lips, but some of the most common terms are very difficult to define, and are often used with the vaguest notions of their real import. What *is* man? What essentially constitutes his humanity, and differentiates him from the lower animals of whose nature he nevertheless partakes? If you are satisfied with such definitions as "*bipes et implumis*," or a "reasoning" or a "talking" animal; or if you think of him as a being having physical and mental qualities superior in

some respects to those of other animals, but essentially of the same order as theirs, the proposition, "God is a Man," will necessarily seem absurd, if not impious. But are such notions sufficient? Perhaps the whole difficulty arises from the inadequacy of our conception of what essentially constitutes manhood. Let us at least see what Swedenborg means by it. We need not for the moment discuss the truth of his conception. Every thinker must be allowed to define his own terms; and in interpreting the proposition, "God is a Man," we must accept the meaning which Swedenborg attaches to the predicate.

According to his teaching man is essentially constituted by the fact that he possesses a range or degree of mind which is capable of apprehending good and evil, in relation to his own individual life and human life in general. He alone among created beings is able to ask himself, and does ask himself, "Is this right or wrong? Ought I to do it or ought I not?" And with this power of intellectual apprehension, which enables him to enter a world of thought which is closed to the mere animal, he possesses a faculty which enables him to follow what he sees to be good and to shun what he sees to be evil, if he will. Other animals have a consciousness of earthly ends and means. Man alone has also a consciousness of spiritual ends and means. If he persistently follows what he believes to be right, in opposition to propensities in himself which draw him in the opposite direction, there is gradually formed within him a love of goodness and truth for their own sakes, or for the spiritual uses which are attainable by their means, apart from any expectation of benefit to himself. This unselfish love of good, and of the truths which minister to it and direct it to useful ends, constitutes his conscience;

and his conscience is purified, enlightened and perfected exactly in the degree that his love of good and perceptions of truth are made the rule of his conduct. Conscience, therefore, is essentially a delight in goodness or usefulness, and in the truths which direct it to beneficent action. Love without truths to guide it is impotent and blind. Indeed, it can never become conscious of itself except as it is embodied in some sort of intellectual idea; and if the intellectual embodiment through which it acts be false or imperfect, its resultant action will be mischievous or imperfect in the same degree. Nor will conscience ever grow, if it remains in the merely ideal state of love and its allied and complementary perceptions of truth. For its development and perpetual increase these must be ultimated in good works; by which Swedenborg means *good work*, sound work of any kind, mental or physical, which is wrought not *for the sake* of any reward—though the reward may be a legitimate and indispensable concomitant—but for the sake of the usefulness of the work itself.

Man, therefore, is man because he is capable of being animated by unselfish love and guided by wisdom to a life of practical usefulness. In other words, he is man because he is capable of becoming love, wisdom and use. For these qualities do not *exist* as abstractions, but as concrete realities; substances and forms, constituting the mind in which they exist. In the degree that these qualities are developed in him, become purified from lower motives and erroneous ideas, and are more consistently and constantly embodied in his life, does he become truly man. In other words, man is man in the degree that he loves unselfishly, knows how to express this love in truly beneficent action, and lives accordingly.

If this is our definition of man, surely the incongruity of the terms in the proposition, "God is a Man," disappears. To think of God as a Divine Man is to think of Him as being infinite Love and Wisdom, active and manifested in Use. In fact it is nothing but the statement in another form that we can only think of God rightly by means of symbols derived from the highest conceivable human qualities, and that God must possess these qualities in infinite perfection.

If this be true, there is only one obstacle in the way of true thinking about God, the difficulty, the impossibility even, of conceiving what *infinite* love and wisdom are. Man's conception of God will necessarily vary according to the conception he is able to form of these attributes. As he himself becomes an embodiment of love and wisdom in use, so will his power of thinking truly about God grow. And this is a process which may be continued indefinitely: for the finite human mind may continually approach both the reproduction in its own nature and the conception of the infinite Love and Wisdom which constitutes the Divine Human Mind without ever being able to attain either completely.

Indeed, it may be truly said that God, though incomprehensible in the sense that finite minds can never adequately grasp His perfections, is at the same time more comprehensible than any other being in the universe. Our fellow-men, like ourselves, are compounds of good and evil, mingled, apparently, in an inextricable complexity; so that a man often seems, even to himself, a multiple personality, so utterly different in feeling, thought, intention and even action does he seem to be at different times. But God is simple, consistent. He is pure love and wisdom; therefore comprehensible just in the degree that these are.

CHAPTER XII

THE INFINITE

We have now reached the centre—not a spacial but a causal centre—from which alone, according to Swedenborg's teaching, the facts of life can be truly viewed; the conception of God, as a Divine Man, a Trinity of Infinite Love, Wisdom, and beneficent Power, the Creator and Sustainer from moment to moment of all that is, who intends and provides nothing but good for all His creatures, whose "tender mercies" are in the most literal and absolute sense "over all His works."

I suppose that no one will deny the attractiveness of this conception. Could we believe that there is such a Being at the heart of the universe, the deepest longings of the soul would be satisfied. If there be indeed "a peace of God which passeth all understanding," attainable by the human mind, surely it must rest on some such belief as this. But to feel the attractiveness of the conception, to see how it would help us to endure the troubles of life with equanimity, and even some measure of cheerful acquiescence, does not enable us to see that it is true. For this we need some mode of interpreting the facts of life which will show that they are consistent with the belief that all things are created and sustained by such a God. This is the task to which we have now to address ourselves; but we must first define our terms with more precision than we have done hitherto. Love, Wisdom, Power, the Infinite—have, in Swedenborg's usage, definite connotations which are, I believe, peculiar

to his teaching, and are certainly essential to the right understanding of it.

There is no word that covers wider and more diverse meanings than "love." It embraces the best and the worst states of the human mind. It is the motive for all action, good or bad. To find in this term the fitting symbol for our thought about God, we must have some means of discriminating the best in the wide category. Most people who attempt to define love of the good kind think of it, I fancy, as a tender feeling of personal liking, which disposes one to promote the happiness and welfare of the beloved object. But this solicitude may exist in very evanescent and deceptive forms, as, for instance, in the relations of the sexes. The ardent lover may appear to others and even to himself to be full of real concern for the welfare of his future wife, and capable of almost any sacrifice on her behalf. Yet, after marriage, his devotion may quickly or slowly cool; may, indeed, change into aversion. It may have been nothing but self-love, masquerading in the garb of true love. So a father or mother may seem very devoted to their children while they are young, and in complete subjection to themselves; but when the children grow up and form opinions and purposes of their own, opposed, perhaps, to those of their parents, the parental love wanes or vanishes. The parents loved the children as their own possessions, as ministering to their own happiness; they loved themselves in them. Genuine love is distinguished from these deceptive counterfeits by this—that its ruling impulse is to *give*, while that of the others is to *get*. The one is essentially unselfish. The other is selfish even in its apparent unselfishness. These two forms of love, which often look so much alike that it is impossible for an observer to distinguish

the one from the other, are, nevertheless, completely opposed in their nature. They constitute in their ultimate development, heaven and hell. It is true that love cannot exist in the human mind absolutely pure. There is always something of self mingled with it. But in unselfish love alone, freed from all human imperfections and limitations, we have the symbol by which we can think of the Divine Love. God has absolutely no purpose which regards Himself. He is, in that respect, utter selflessness. He is the pure and total desire to give.

Love is commonly conceived as an emotion which comes and goes in consciousness, and, when it is not in consciousness, has but a potential existence, like something in the memory, when we are not thinking about it. But, in Swedenborg's conception, love is the very substance of the mind, out of which all its intellectual forms and processes are fashioned. And in like manner Divine Love is God's very substance, from which all other substances are derived. It is the ultimate Reality.

Love, if directed towards persons, is supposed to be an essentially personal affection. But good human love is, according to Swedenborg, always tending to transcend the mere love of persons; to fix its regard on qualities rather than person; though, as these qualities exist only in persons, personal affection is not abolished by this extension, but made more universal. Genuine love regards the good, actual or possible, in its object. It thus becomes the neighbour and friend of all. This affection based on character, actual or potential, is apt to strike us as rather cold and unattractive. We want our friends to love us for ourselves alone, and not for any good they see or think they see in us—still less for any good they think we may be capable of attaining. We

like them to be blind to our faults. But without denying the charm of hearty, unquestioning, uncritical, natural affection, which we all feel, and which is, I take it, the secret of the pleasure we find in the affection of dogs and other animals, we can see how limited and unstable it is if it is not redeemed by some nobler element of affection. Only as something higher than mere personality is the object of love does it become

> An ever fixed mark,
> Which looks on tempests and is never shaken.

Wisdom is a term which is often applied to qualities which would be more accurately described as sagacity or foresight; a clear perception of the indirect and covert means by which selfish ends may be attained. But Swedenborg applies the term solely to the processes in the understanding by which genuine love perceives that its ends can best be accomplished. Wisdom is nothing but love finding the means for its own exercise. It is the intellectual process, form, or manifestation of love.

Divine Power has nothing in it allied to the absolute and arbitrary self-will of an earthly despot. It is simply the Divine Love and Wisdom acting. It is abhorrent both to love and wisdom to compel, when willing obedience may be secured. To win from man willing obedience, the obedience of love, of delight, by enlisting his affections on the side of good, is the supreme end of the Divine Love and Wisdom; for in this alone does man's eternal happiness consist. Divine Power is directed solely to the achievement of this end through human freedom; for delight in good or use for its own sake is heaven in man, and this heaven can never be created except in freedom.

Swedenborg's conception of the Infinite, also, differs greatly from any that has been proposed by other writers, so far as I am aware. He means an Infinite of Love and Wisdom, in Divine Human form, directed solely to the formation out of the human race in all worlds of an immense heaven of use, which will never cease to grow in numbers and perfection to eternity. The innumerable suns which bestrew the heavens, all of which are, or will be, surrounded by planetary systems, with human beings dwelling upon them, have been created out of the Divine Love by means of the Divine Wisdom and are constantly sustained by an act as truly creative as that which first called them into existence. And this is true, not only of the systems and their inhabitants in general, but of every particular process, physical or mental, however minute, which takes place in them. The spiritual universe, incomparably vaster than the illimitable physical universe, and consisting of all the human beings who have passed by death into the eternal world, is equally sustained in being by the same power, and kept in an inviolable order, not only as a whole, but as to every particular of the human minds of which the immeasurable whole is composed. And this constant dependence of the universe, and of its minutest constituent parts, on its Creator, is maintained by the Infinite God with the utmost ease, because there is no *ratio* between any finite or aggregate of finites, however vast, and the Infinite.

The next point to be noticed in connection with Swedenborg's conception of the Infinite is one that may seem, at first sight, utterly inconsistent with the statements that have just been made. He often says that God *cannot* do this or that. "What!" the critic may cry, "Infinite Power *cannot!* Infinite Power is *limited!*

Can there be a plainer contradiction in terms?" But if you think for a moment you will see that Love and Wisdom must be subject to stringent limitations, not, indeed, imposed on them from without, but inherent in their own nature. Does not every advance a man makes in love and wisdom—in Swedenborg's sense—mean limitations on his action? The man who acts from selfish love and its ingenuities has a thousand courses open to him which are closed by genuine love and true wisdom. So far as man's love and wisdom become exalted and stable does moral evil become impossible to him. All real spiritual advance means limitation, inevitably; not limitation from outside, but from within. How much more must this be true of Infinite Love and Wisdom! The finite mind, even at its best, may reach the limits of its unselfish love and so fail to discern the true course; or its wisdom may be defective, and, wishing to take the right path, it may take the wrong. But the possibilities of error which exist for the finite mind in consequence of its imperfections, cannot exist for the Divine Mind in which both love and wisdom must always concur to indicate the absolute best, and no other course can be possible.

But, further, if God created the universe, as other theologians besides Swedenborg have taught, out of Himself, and not out of nothing, we shall easily see that He must be, as it were, limited by His own creative acts. Having created anything, God must thereafter act towards that thing according to the nature He has given it. For creation being the expression, in orders of being beneath the Divine, of qualities which constitute the nature of God Himself, to act upon created things otherwise than according to the nature He has given them would imply action against Himself, would indicate a

lack of harmony between Himself and His creation, a lack of harmony, indeed, in His own nature. This limitation, also, we must style "self-limitation"; and it is a condition of perfect creation.

All the puzzles which have been proposed respecting the limitations of Divine Power are reducible to this simple principle. Can God make 2 and 2 anything but 4? No. Because 2+2 or 3+1 or 1+1+1+1 are only different ways of stating 4. Every course of correct deductive reasoning comes under the same denomination. It is a mere demonstration of facts which are implicitly contained in the premises from which we start. Therefore, if the premises are true, Divine Power cannot make the conclusion other than true.

This conception of the inherent, necessary limitations of Divine Power is fundamental to Swedenborg's teaching. Without it the interpretation of the facts of life which he proffers is unintelligible.

CHAPTER XIII

CREATION

It is unlikely that any one who has made his first acquaintance with Swedenborg's teaching through these pages has been fully convinced that the conclusions we have reached are true, and a reliable basis for deduction. There are, indeed, legitimate grounds for hesitation in passing such a judgment, which we have not yet been able to deal with. Nevertheless, we must necessarily ignore such doubts. We should make no headway at all if we did not make the position we have so far reached the starting-point for further progress. The chief means we have of verifying it is in seeing its power to account for and harmonise those facts which seem, at first sight, most inconsistent with it. How, then, are we to carry the doubters with us, while we proceed to view the facts from the centre we have reached, the conception of God as a Divine Man who is infinite Love and Wisdom? Only by their giving a provisional assent to the conclusion we have reached. Such assent is neither irrational nor necessarily fruitless. It is just such an assent as a scientific investigator gives to a theory of the truth of which he is not convinced, but which he sees may be true, and to which he desires to give candid consideration. He assumes its truth provisionally, in order that he may see whether it covers the facts to which it is directly or indirectly related. That is, he admits it as a working hypothesis, the truth of

which can only be finally established by its capacity to give an intelligible and coherent explanation of all the facts involved. We must, therefore, assume that our main positions are admitted; and proceed to show what consequences can be legitimately inferred from them, and how far the facts of life are explicable by means of them.

The first natural inference would be that in a universe so constituted there could be no physical or moral evil. To account for these facts consistently with the principles we have stated, we are compelled to assume that somewhere in the order of creation there is an element which, though it is derived from God, is not necessarily accordant with His will. Such an element might human free-will be if the totality of human minds is, as Swedenborg teaches, a factor in the causal chain of creative causes, and capable, therefore, when perverted, of generating not only physical and moral evil in man himself, but those phenomena outside of man which it seems most difficult to recognise as being the work of a God of love.

There is another difficulty which must be faced. It may, perhaps, be admitted that the ideas of a personal God and of an immanent God are both conceivable, but it may be urged that they cannot both be true; and the position which is now our central principle requires us to believe that both *are* true. "It is possible to think," it may be said, "of a personal God separate from the universe, and it is possible to think of a God who is immanent in the universe—who *is*, indeed, the universe; but it is impossible to harmonise the two ideas. The one excludes the other." We seem, in fact, to have arrived at that *impasse* which was described in a former chapter as constituting the great difficulty

of modern religious thought. "There is no apparatus of thought by which the mind can intelligently bridge over the gap which exists between its conceptions of God and its conceptions of nature." The question we have now to consider is whether the teaching of Swedenborg provides us with such an "apparatus of thought." I believe it does. All serious and affirmative students of his works believe that it does, and that this is one of its crowning excellences. At the same time it must be admitted that the conceptions by means of which the connection is established are exceedingly difficult to state clearly. I am myself very sensible of this, and of my inability to deal adequately with the subject, especially within the limits imposed by the plan of this work. Nevertheless, the task must be undertaken. For the conceptions by means of which the mind is enabled to combine the ideas of a personal and an immanent God form, as it were, the solid framework which sustains the whole body of Swedenborg's theological and philosophical doctrine. Without this, it collapses, just as the human body would collapse and become a mass of helpless pulp, if the rigid skeleton, which holds it upright, and thus enables all its delicate internal organs to perform their functions in freedom, were withdrawn from it. I would urge my readers not to be discouraged if they find themselves unable at first to apprehend the meaning of this "apparatus of thought," except in a very obscure way. Ideas on all subjects—and especially on the highest—must be apprehended obscurely, before they are apprehended clearly. How very obscure to a child are its first perceptions of the meaning of abstract arithmetical quantities and relations! Yet how simple and self-evident do these become, within certain limits, by practice!

A man who is versed in the higher branches of mathematics moves confidently in a range of abstract ideas which are absolutely incomprehensible to the ordinary mind. How often do we feel, in reading a book on some rather abstruse subject, that the writer's thought has passed into a sphere where, for the time at least, we are unable to follow him. We have suddenly lost touch with him. He has passed beyond the range of our mental vision. It would be very rash to conclude from this that he has passed out of the range of intelligibility and useful investigation. Experience teaches us that conceptions that may be, for the moment, unavoidably obscure may yet possess the promise of great future value. The theory of the constitution of the atom, which is now so much occupying the minds of our leading physicists, is admitted to be in many respects obscure, to be far from having attained the position of a demonstrated fact. Yet few of them doubt that the fundamental conception on which they are working is destined to modify profoundly the ideas of matter which have hitherto prevailed.

With this preamble, let us try to see what means are furnished by Swedenborg's teaching, which may help us to correlate the idea of a personal God as a perpetual and immanent Creator, with the universe as known to us by our senses. The method by which he attempts to accomplish this is known as the doctrine of "discrete degrees." It is, as a definite statement of a law of Divine Order, peculiar to Swedenborg's teaching, though anticipations of it are to be found in ancient philosophy, and in the writings of some of the mystics. Our inquiry may be conveniently divided into three branches.

1. What Swedenborg means by "discrete degrees."

2. How he was led to the conviction that they exist as an integral element in the order of creation.
3. The means we have of verifying his teaching.

1. What Swedenborg means by "Discrete Degrees"

To state the doctrine in the simplest way, he means that there are substances of many orders composing the universe, of which substances matter, regarded as to its place in the series, is the lowest, and also the most inert and lifeless. The primary, self-existent substance is the infinite God from whom, and out of whom, all subsidiary and finite substances have their origin. Thus there are mental substances out of which minds, both human and animal, are formed. But these mental substances are themselves of several discrete degrees, which are exhibited psychologically in the distinctness of their functions. Thus there are three distinctively human degrees in the mind of man, though he is unconscious of their existence during his life on earth; and there are three degrees in the minds of animals; the higher being characteristic of the superior, and the lower of the inferior animals, and in these animal degrees of mind man participates. If any particular action or passion of the mind could be examined so exhaustively as to disclose all its constituents, discrete degrees would be found in that. In fact discrete degrees exist in the greatest things and in the least things of every kind, and this because the universe consists of infinite series of causes and effects, which form, nevertheless, such a unity that no element in it is totally disconnected from the rest.

The meaning of the term "discrete" may be gathered in some measure from the degrees called

"continuous" with which they are contrasted. The latter consist of more or less of the same kind of thing or quality—such as light, heat, density, weight in the physical world, or love, intelligence, knowledge, industry, fortitude in the mental world. In these qualities there may be indefinite and imperceptible gradations of more or less, on the same plane. But discrete degrees are related as prior and posterior, cause and effect, inner and outer—interpreting these terms, not as representing an order in space and time, but a relationship in the series of creative processes by which all things in a lower sphere or plane depend on a higher sphere or plane, and the operation of the higher on the lower.

A relatively exterior or lower degree, whether it be of the mental or physical order, is always produced by the composition or aggregation of the elements or units of which the proximately interior degree consists. This mode of composition, by which a grosser product, fit for a coarser, more general, more limited function, is evolved from finer and purer elements, is exhibited to the senses in the production of a muscle or nerve from smaller aggregates of the primary fibres. A similar composition exists also in mental substances, though these are invisible to the physical eye. All these created substances proceed in order of production from the first self-existing and infinite Substance, in a series linked together, as it were, in a chain of causation which is such that the higher elements in it can subsist without the lower, but the lower cannot subsist without the higher. As this process of creation —which is in ceaseless operation, subsistence being nothing but perpetual creation—is effected, there is a gradual but discontinuous privation of vitality and

power in each lower degree as compared with the degree immediately prior to it; the lower, nevertheless, preserving some resemblance to the higher, which not only forms but continually actuates it. The ultimate substance, or aggregate of substances, is matter; in which, regarded in itself, that is as apart from the interior degrees which actuate it, there is a complete privation of Divine and mental life, it being totally inert except from the operation of the prior degrees upon it. The only indications of the source from which it sprang are in its representation, in a physical image or embodiment, of the spiritual substances from which it is derived, and in the corresponding uses which it is capable of serving on its own plane.

Such, in briefest statement, is Swedenborg's doctrine of discrete degrees. We have now to see, if we can, how he was led to the conviction that creation consists in an orderly, linked procession of such degrees. To do this in an adequate manner it would be necessary to write a history of Swedenborg's mind, a task of great interest and difficulty, which has not hitherto been attempted, but which will, no doubt, be attempted hereafter. For this I am quite incompetent, even did space permit. I can only put together a few indications bearing on the subject before us.

2. How Swedenborg was led to the Conviction that Discrete Degrees are an Integral Element in the Order of Creation

I suppose it is fairly clear to all who are in the habit of thinking about their own thoughts, that philosophy, using the term in the widest sense, is the offspring of

the fundamental convictions or assumptions from which the thinker starts at any given moment. The idea that the mind can commence its inquiries as a mere *tabula rasa* or blank, and reach its philosophical conclusions by a pure process of induction and deduction, is absurd. The mind never is such a *tabula rasa.* It would not be a mind if it were. Philosophy or explanation is a late phenomenon in the development of the human reason, and when it embarks on this career it is already possessed by a multitude of conscious, semi-conscious, and, we might almost add, unconscious convictions, inextricably mixed up with affections, aspirations, loves, which are still more obscure, and still more vital and influential. From these complex states the mind necessarily philosophises or explains. Nature, in itself, contains no explanation; only practical indications of what will happen in given circumstances, and, consequently, of what our conduct must be, if we would achieve such ends as depend on a knowledge and control of our natural environment. We ourselves bring the explanation to nature, and we read into its facts the fundamental assumptions from which we start. These are our *principia,* the determinants of our thought, which colour and mould our thinking even when we are little conscious of their influence.

It is easy to see, therefore, how profoundly the deepest convictions and above all the deepest affections of a man's nature must affect his philosophy of the facts of life. The man who does not believe in God, and does not want to believe in Him, will philosophise in one way. The man who does believe and loves to believe will philosophise in another. We need not here discuss the question whether the one

standpoint is more likely to lead to true conclusions than the other. We are merely noting a universal characteristic of that kind of mind which feels itself irresistibly impelled to seek an explanation, a comprehensive, connected and consistent view, of the facts of life as a whole.

Now Swedenborg appears to have had throughout his career this fixed standpoint, a profound, unwavering belief in God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Scepticism in the ordinary sense, doubt as to the existence of God, or as to the closeness and constancy of His relation to the created universe, seems never to have invaded his mind. Ever ready to revise and remodel his conceptions on all other points in the light of wider experience and clearer perception, this remained for him the fundamental postulate of all rational thought; the negation of it the destruction of all true intelligence. To a mind so constituted there could be but one aim in the study of any natural object—to discover (as, I think, Dr. Garth Wilkinson has somewhere said) what the Creator intended by it, and how its make exhibited His design. He was never troubled by a doubt whether any existing thing had a use. He always assumed that it had. His sole aim was to discern it. If he failed he was not disturbed, for he saw clearly how impossible it must be for the finite mind to discern all the uses intended by the infinite Mind.

Moreover, he attached—and every mind in a state at all like his must necessarily attach—great weight to the instinctive perceptions and intuitions of the mind. For he believed that these came from God, and came for a purpose or use. The mere fact that the mind was impelled to ask a question was an assur-

ance to him that an answer could be found adequate to its needs. Contrary to the practice of his time, which tended to bar rational inquiry in the religious domain as destructive of faith, he deemed no subject so sacred or so profound as to be beyond the range of investigation. He was convinced that all facts of every kind may be rationally understood, and that the thing that is not, in some measure, rationally understood is not really believed, however loudly and even sincerely it may be professed.

But while Swedenborg had this firm belief in the value of the intuitions of the mind, he was well aware how prone men are to reason falsely from assumed principles, and even to assume as axioms things that are false; and he therefore laid it down as a maxim that all such conclusions must be confirmed by experience. No man, I suppose, ever lived who felt more strongly the necessity of planting himself on definite, ascertainable facts. In order to establish any conclusion, all known facts must concur.

In view of these principles Swedenborg was convinced that the material universe, having proceeded from God, must be capable of disclosing to the mind that would reverently study it with that aim, much about the method of His working even in the invisible sphere. For God being always and everywhere the same, all His works must have a self-similarity which renders it possible to infer a law in the invisible sphere from one in the visible.

In the early part of his career, when the religious aim was not yet predominant, he conceived that the whole finite universe was necessarily constructed on mechanical principles; and he projected a new mathematical method, which he called "the mathematics of uni-

versals," by which he thought that the inadequacy of language, due to its physical associations, to express the transcendent processes by which creation must be effected, might be corrected. His conceptions, at this period, of the nature of the created universe, have been described as a kind of "innocent materialism." Even in this, the more purely scientific and philosophical period of his career, he was profoundly impressed with the importance of discrete degrees in the order of the physical, and especially of the organic world. For instance, he consistently maintained that the ether was the origin both of atmospheric air and of matter by a process of successive composition, a position to which modern science seems to be tending.

But with his intromission into the spiritual world there came a great extension and correction of his ideas of substance and of discrete degrees. He saw that the physical world alone was the subject of mathematics and mechanics, and that there were worlds within worlds, interior to matter, to which these processes of thought have no application. Following this enlarged and corrected thought in the briefest and most general way, the order of creation as conceived by him may be stated as follows. The statement involves some repetition, for the sake of elucidating the present subject, of what has been already said.

God is the one self-existent Substance and Form from which all other substances and forms are derived. This substance and form is utterly inconceivable by any finite mind except by means of finite symbols, the fundamental of which is that He is a Divine Man. The first act of creation—not in time, for time has no relation to this sphere, but in order—is the putting forth from the Divine of a finite emanation of love and

wisdom from Himself, which is presented constantly before the eyes of the angels of the highest heavens, and more or less frequently before the angels of the lower heavens, as a Sun of incomparable splendour, from which they derive all the spiritual heat or love, and all the spiritual light or wisdom, they enjoy. This Sun, in which the outflowing Divine first becomes sensible to angelic minds, is still far beyond their apprehension as to its contents; this manifestation of the Divine Love and Wisdom being so intense in its ardour, so far above the capacity of any finite mind to receive in fulness, that, were it not tempered by intermediate forms, which are spiritual atmospheres, and so adapted to reception by angelic minds, it would consume instead of blessing them. It appears before the faces of the angels midway between the horizon and the zenith, and at an apparent distance comparable to that of the sun of our planetary system from the earth. But though the Sun of the spiritual world appears to be far removed from the angels, and is, indeed, spiritually, that is, qualitatively, far removed, it is yet the representation to their consciousness of something that is in them, the most permanent and essential relation in which they stand to God, that of receiving and willing to receive all their love and all their wisdom and, therefore, all their life by a perpetual gift from Him. When their perception of this fact and their love of the perception are vivid, their Sun shines with full power. When the perception becomes obscured, the Sun is overclouded. But that this Sun is, in reality, within them, is vividly brought home to their consciousness by the fact that it remains constantly before their eyes, at the same elevation, however they may turn their bodies about in one direction or another.

The first stage of creation consists, therefore, in a manifestation and at the same time a limitation of the Infinite Love and Wisdom in a sphere far above the grasp of the highest finite intelligence, but which is yet capable of entering the human consciousness, because it first forms it. Here, to Swedenborg's apprehension, was a discrete degree; a degree discreted from the Divine itself from which it sprang, and from the affections and thoughts of the angels into which it flowed.

When Swedenborg became acquainted with the constitution of the societies of the spiritual world to which he was admitted, and with the mode of their communication with each other, he found other discrete degrees exhibited in them. The higher heavens appear to be above the lower; yet they are not separated in space, but in the quality of their spiritual life; and the life of the lower is so dependent on the life of the higher that they are inseparable. The affections and thoughts of the higher form the affections and thoughts of the lower, by their particulars being compounded into grosser and more general states, receptive of a lower degree of love and wisdom; so that the particulars consciously contained in the affections and thoughts of angels of a higher heaven may be as thousands to one of those which are compounded out of them. That these degrees of mind, though they are so distinct that the affections and thoughts of angels of a higher heaven are incomprehensible to those of a lower, are nevertheless not separated, was evidenced to him by the fact that it is possible for an angel of a higher heaven to descend into a lower one; that is, his consciousness may pass from the degree of his mind where it normally resides to a lower degree which in him is

normally quiescent. But in doing so he necessarily passes out of the state of love and wisdom which is characteristic of his own heaven and puts on that of the heaven to which he descends. He loses sight of the objects which he perceived around him by means of his senses in his own heaven and becomes conscious only of the objects in the lower heaven. Similarly it is possible for an angel of a lower heaven to ascend—if there is some useful purpose to be served by such experience—into a higher heaven; that is, for his consciousness to be transferred from the lower degree where it normally resides to a higher degree which in him is normally quiescent; in which case he is raised, for the time, into the love and wisdom of the heaven to which he ascends. He also then loses sight of the objects of his own heaven and perceives only those of the heaven to which he has come. But in neither case can the change be permanent. The higher angel cannot be satisfied with the degree of love and wisdom of the lower. It does not fill his capacity to the full, and cannot. Therefore he desires to return to his own place. And so does the other for a different reason. The sphere of heaven to which he has come exceeds his capacity for reception. It oppresses him. He, too, soon longs to return to his own place, a state congenial to his nature, in which alone he can find an abiding home.

Similarly the affections and thoughts of men, which constitute their life, are not self-generated, but pass into their minds out of the spiritual world, and are the very affections and thoughts which exist there, manifested in a more obscure and general embodiment. So that the mental states of men, and indeed, of other animals, are in this respect comparable to the motions

of the body, which are perceived by the senses as a simple movement of the limbs, but on a deeper inspection are seen to result from the associated action of finer and still finer component parts, until the origin of the motion is lost in the action of fibres so infinitesimally small that they elude observation.

When we pass from the world of mind, or the spiritual world, to the world of matter, we find a similar mode of production, but in a different way. The matter of which the physical body is composed is not derived directly from the spirit which animates it, but, obviously to the senses, from the material world in which, as a physical organism, it exists, and ultimately from the sun, which is, according to Swedenborg, not only the centre and support of the solar system, but the proximate cause of its existence. For it is an axiom with him, that an effect can be maintained only by the continual action of the cause or causes which produced it. When, therefore, we find a cause operating universally in the maintenance of any system, we may infer that the same cause produced it. Thus the nervous system governs every action of the body: the nervous system, therefore, as a subordinate and instrumental cause, produced the body. The commencement of every solar system is the creation of a sun. From the activity of this primal sun all the auras are put forth which, by a process of composition and aggregation according to discrete degrees, ultimately produce the ponderable atmosphere and matter out of which the physical world is formed. The physical sun, however, is created by a process of emanation from the spiritual Sun, by discrete degrees corresponding to those which exist in and constitute the spiritual world; and the matters derived from the

physical sun have this quality from their origin, that they are capable of being actuated by spiritual forces, and consequently of representing them in a material image or embodiment. In themselves—that is, regarded as separated from their originating forces—the physical sun and the material universe derived from it are dead.

Thus the Divine in creating necessarily finites itself, puts off by distinct stages or degrees its own infinite life, and in each successive degree manifests itself in a lower order of love and wisdom, until at last in the material and physical sphere there is nothing of love and wisdom, but only the tendency to and capacity for uses which are subservient to love and wisdom.

It will be seen that Swedenborg's doctrine of creation is essentially a spiritual monism,[1] but one consistent with the statement that in the ultimate of creation, that is in the material universe *per se*, there is nothing of God; since life has there ended in death, activity in inertia, love and wisdom in mechanism.

3. The Means We have of verifying Swedenborg's Doctrine of Discrete Degrees

I think it will be admitted that the doctrine briefly described in the last section does supply an "apparatus of thought" which enables us to correlate the two apparently inconsistent ideas of a personal and an immanent God. This is something gained; but it is not enough. We need to be assured that it is a trustworthy apparatus; that in using it we are thinking rightly, according to the actual constitution of things. How is this assurance to be gained? We have seen that the full

[1] See Appendix.

development of the doctrine was only reached by Swedenborg himself after he had been admitted to conscious, continuous and protracted intercourse with the spiritual world. We have not this intercourse and cannot have it. How then can we reach the conclusion which for him was based on experience?

I am inclined to think that no one will ever accept the doctrine in all its extent, until he accepts the experiences of Swedenborg as genuine, real and trustworthy; and even more, as an indispensable element in that process of spiritual education, by which, under the Divine Providence, he was fitted for his great mission—to make all our conceptions of spiritual and natural things harmonious and self-consistent as grouped round the central conception of God as a Divine Man. But at present I must not assume that such an acceptance is given by my readers, or can be given. I must rather assume that it cannot; that they have given to his peculiar and abnormal experience only a "provisional assent," such as has been asked for our central position; but that they are not yet prepared to accept that experience as, in some sort, equivalent to their own.

I will admit, therefore, that, from the standpoint of our own experience merely, proof, strict verification, is impossible. Our programme shall be modest. We will be content to ask, "Are there facts in our own experience which should lead us to regard the doctrine of discrete degrees with attention and respect; as giving promise of a valuable and even indispensable aid to clear, rational thought on spiritual subjects?" To this question I hope it will be found possible to elicit an affirmative reply.

In pursuing this investigation it will be useful to arrange our inquiry under three heads.

1. In view of our central position no other intelligible account can be given of the facts of life as a whole.
2. Our experience tends to confirm the doctrine.
3. It is reasonable to suppose that our experience is an example of a universal law.

1. NO OTHER INTELLIGIBLE ACCOUNT CAN BE GIVEN OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION THAN THAT WHICH IS AFFORDED BY THE DOCTRINE OF DISCRETE DEGREES.—On page 107 I asked those who doubted the truth of the position we had reached, and which was to be thenceforth our starting point, to give a "provisional assent" to that position. But this assent must not be pressed unduly. Such readers, if they are prepared to say, "It may be true," must also, at the same time, keep in their minds the alternative, "It may be false." And probably in the minds of several of them the question may have arisen, "Is it clear that the ideas of a personal and an immanent God *must* be reconciled? May not God, conceivably, be personal and not immanent; or immanent and not personal?" The one alternative would be very much like the unreflecting, undoctrinal thought of the majority of Christian people. The other is Pantheism, so far as this can be said to assert the existence of a God at all, as in the deeply interesting works of the late Mr. Allanson Picton. In order, therefore, not to abuse the "provisional assent" that has been solicited, we must see that neither of these alternatives can be a satisfactory explanation of the entire facts of life.

Let us first look at what may be called the popular, orthodox Christian view. "God is a personal being," it may be said, "but to assert that He is immanent in

nature is pure assumption, and presumption to boot. God created the universe out of nothing, by His mere *fiat*, but having been created, it needs no sustaining power, even from God. No doubt God could uncreate or destroy it as easily as He created it, if He chose ; but until He does so it subsists, according to the laws He has imposed upon it, by its own inherent forces."

According to this conception Divine Power is absolutely unlimited and undetermined even by its own nature. God might have created the universe, had He so pleased, in innumerable other ways than He actually has done. There was no process in creation, but a mere exercise of absolute and omnipotent will. This doctrine interprets in the most literal and unconditional sense the words, " With God all things are possible." In creating " He spake, and it was done ; He commanded, and it stood fast."

The first remark we have to make on this conception is that it is unthinkable. Creation out of nothing may be assented to, just as any formula the terms of which are not understood may be assented to, but it cannot be thought out. It bars rational thought, which is always a thought of process. This may be deemed an objection of little weight, for, from this point of view, we should have no reason to suppose that the universe is, or is intended to be, intelligible, except as a complex of natural phenomena. The impulses of arbitrary and unconditioned self-determination must be incomprehensible except to the being in whom they originate. But it also contradicts experience. One of the most universal facts of experience is that an effect persists only so long as its cause operates. A stream flows only so long as it is fed from its source or sources. An engine moves only so long as the power which drives it is

applied. To suppose, therefore, that the universe persists apart from the continued operation of the Cause that produced it is discountenanced by experience.

But, further, our experience of the works of God visible in nature shows us very clearly that He works by means, by processes. There is never any magical production *ex nihilo*, but, on the contrary, procedure by orderly steps, one thing being linked on to another thing as parts of a never-ending series. Is it reasonable to suppose that this characteristic, which is universal in nature, is totally abrogated in the invisible sphere? Must we not assume that process obtains there, though unperceived by us?

But the most fatal objection to this doctrine of creation by mere *fiat* remains to be stated. It is destructive of our belief in the perfect goodness of God. For it is idle to speak of the goodness of God unless there be some similarity between it and ours, however infinitely it may transcend ours. Now, according to this theory, God could, if He chose, at once transform every bad man into a good man, and every evil spirit into an angel. Indeed, evil need never have existed, for any possible good which may be attained through the permission of evil might, on this theory, have been attained without it. But can we conceive it possible for a Being of perfect goodness to refrain from doing any good act that is within His power? We cannot. He would not, under such circumstances, be perfectly good. "He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Now let us turn to Pantheism, and turn with sympathy; for there is a grand truth enshrined in it. But it has, as ordinarily expounded, this fatal defect, that, sinking God in nature, it cannot find any place in its system for human free-will, one of the most universal

and ineradicable dictates of consciousness; nor, consequently, for any real distinction between good and evil, another such dictate. In vain does a spiritual pantheist of the stamp of Mr. Picton, full of zeal for righteousness, seek to maintain such a distinction under the principle he adopts. The sensualist and self-seeker will reply to him, "Your God, God as you know Him, may make for what you call righteousness, purity, self-denial, usefulness. My God makes for no such things, but for self-enjoyment: and mine is as much God as yours. I myself am a manifestation of God. Why then should I attempt to curb any desire I feel and which I find it is worth while to indulge? It is absurd to imagine that I can do so. If I am ever to be what you call righteous, I shall be so because I cannot help it."

Now the weakness of the position of a pantheist who wishes to sustain the moral order does not lie in the fact that his appeals fail to carry conviction, for people will always find reasons for rejecting truths which they do not wish to believe. It lies in the fact that the objection is, from the pantheist's own standpoint, valid and unanswerable. Therefore pantheism pure and simple can never satisfy the religious consciousness, to which good and evil, right and wrong, are the supreme realities and certainties of life.

But if no explanation of the facts of life as a whole is to be found either in a God separate from nature or in a God who simply *is* nature, what solution is possible except through some such conception as that of discrete degrees or connected and connecting intermediates, by which the *I Am*—the essential Being of the universe—can be thought of as the First and also the Last?

We are thus led to the doctrine of discrete degrees by a process of exclusion of other alternatives.

2. OUR EXPERIENCE TENDS TO CONFIRM THE DOCTRINE. —We have seen, in an earlier chapter, that if we assent to the proposition that substance, as we know it, consists of its qualities, we must admit the existence of spiritual, thinking, feeling substance as well as that of material, ponderable, mechanical substance. Assuming, then, that there is such a thing as spiritual substance, can we conceive it as totally disconnected from material substance? Rational thought seems to dictate that it cannot be so conceived. There is nothing in the universe, so far as we know, that is wholly disconnected from the rest. Even the mote that floats in the air is bound by invisible bonds to the most distant star. Everything that exists, exists in a series. If then mental substance exists, distinct from material substance and yet not disconnected, what relation can be conceived to exist between the two? The only one we know anything about is that of cause and effect. The phenomenon most familiar to us is that we will, think and act mentally, and thereupon innumerable nerves, blood-vessels, muscular fibres, and bones instantly obey, as if they were merely constructed to carry out our behests in the world of nature. And not only are our intentions thus expressed, but our emotions, and that with a vividness that is beyond art. The smile, the tear, the frown—what are they but motions of matter in space? They derive all their meaning from the mind which generates them, and the mind which reads them as intelligible signs. All that we know of mind implies that it is causative, not of matter itself, but of those motions which alone give matter any meaning, and enable us to influence the material environment in which we move.

If this be true, there must be *some* connection between mental and material substances, wherever we find such

phenomena as those just described. The two substances must be, in some sense, in contact. Without contact there can be no action of one thing on another. We have therefore, in our experience, two substances which, by common consent, it is impossible by any process of thought to amalgamate, the one a thinking and feeling substance, the other a physical and mechanical substance; and the one acts upon the other. Have we not here, at least one discrete degree?

Now, if one discrete degree be admitted, there can be no intellectual difficulty in supposing that others exist in the mind, though unconsciously, and that they may hereafter become the seat of consciousness. I remember, when the Society for Psychic Research was being formed many years ago, a well-known scientific man who was one of its most active founders said to me,—*à propos* of the alleged phenomena of Spiritualism, which were to be impartially investigated—in substance, this: "I think we ought first of all to concentrate our attention on the question, 'Can the simple *rap* be produced by non-physical means?' Because if it *can*, we shall have demonstrated that a fact exists which present-day science is wholly unable to account for; and it would then be irrational to suppose that no other similar facts exist. We should have broken down the chief defence of scepticism by that simple demonstration." I think he was right, and that events have proved it. But the same argument may be applied to the doctrine of discrete degrees. Once admit that mind is a substance distinct from matter and yet acting on it—and I do not see how these things can logically be denied—and you will have broken down, in your own mind, the barrier of scepticism with regard to discrete degrees.

3. IT IS REASONABLE TO SUPPOSE THAT OUR EXPERIENCE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A UNIVERSAL LAW.—The conception that man is a microcosm, exemplifying in his own nature the constitution of the macrocosm or universe, seems to be as old as human thought, and has shown an extraordinary vitality. It implies that there is nothing in man that is not also in nature; and nothing in nature that has not its counterpart in man. This thought has been revived of late years, especially by religious thinkers of the school of the late Professor Drummond, and it is not uncommon to find in their works such an expression as this, "The physical universe is a working model of the spiritual universe." If this conception is more than a figure of speech, it should imply that if there is a soul in man, there is also a soul in nature; and that the soul in nature acts upon the physical world as the mind of man acts upon his body. And if we would look upon the phenomena of organic nature with unprejudiced eyes, we should surely perceive in its processes as clear indications of intelligent adaptation of means to ends as we find in the mind and body of man. What a profound mystery is form and its transmission by heredity! Who can imagine that unconscious atoms of matter arrange themselves spontaneously in the exquisite order we perceive in the plant or the animal body? Common sense should tell us that when matter behaves in this way, so foreign to its intrinsic nature, it is in the grasp of some power other than itself, a power instinct with intelligence. If we saw, over some intervening obstacle, a flag waving in the air, we should say, "Something is moving it. Flags don't wave unless they are moved." If on closer observation we noticed that intelligible signs were being made with the flag, we should say, "A man must have hold of it."

And this would be essentially true, even though the actual motion was produced by a machine. Now when lifeless, motionless atoms of matter are gathered up from inanimate nature by vegetable and animal organisms, as we know they are, and straightway seem to become endowed with an exquisite precision of movement to a definite end, are we not justified in saying—nay, rather compelled to say—"These motions are guided by intelligence"? Our experience therefore suggests that there is a soul in nature as there is a soul in man, and that this too is a substance discrete from matter.

Again, what a remarkable fact it is, though little adverted to, that all the terms—or nearly all—by which we describe states of mind are derived from the physical world. Take up any book dealing with inner human life, a novel, a drama, or a book on psychology, ethics or religion, and above all books, the Bible, open it at random and you will find that almost every idea expressed in the page you turn to consists of physical phenomena used as images of mental phenomena. And the transition in the mind from the physical and spatial to the mental and non-spatial is so easy and instinctive that it occasions not a moment's difficulty. The one is perceived to be the apt and adequate symbol of the other. How is it that light always means intelligence; heat always means love; that the mind hungers and thirsts, is starved and dwarfed, or grows, blossoms, bears fruit, yes, and procreates children? Surely there must be some profound and universal *reason* in the constitution of things for a phenomenon so universal. Now if mind be, as Swedenborg teaches, the formative principle in nature—albeit, so far as the human mind is concerned in the process, unconscious of the effects it

produces—these things have at once their sufficient explanation. Physical things are used as images of mental things because they *are* images; because they represent and correspond to the mental things from which they derive their qualities and forms.

I hope enough has been said to justify our thesis; and even to warrant the hope that the doctrine of discrete degrees will prove to be what Swedenborg alleged it was, "a key to unlock the causes of things."

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE

MAN is not man in virtue of the physical qualities which distinguish him from the lower animals; nor in virtue of those superior mental endowments which are directed only to worldly ends. He is not man because he can build larger and more commodious dwellings than the beaver or the bee, and make more elaborate calculations than a learned pig, nor even because he can form general or abstract ideas and thus express his thought by articulate speech. These are, indeed, attributes of his manhood, for the lower animals do not possess them, but they do not essentially constitute it. They are rather the results of his incipient or potential manhood. Body is plastic to mind, and always tends to become more perfect as this becomes ennobled. And the lower faculties of mind in man which he shares with the animal creation are plastic to the distinctively human faculties which act upon them and may control them. The true man is one who has become capable of receiving, consciously and willingly, some infinitesimal share of that Divine Love and Wisdom which constitute the very being of God; and with it the power of transmitting this influent life in unselfish usefulness to his fellow-creatures. The more fully he becomes capable of receiving and transmitting this Divine life, the more he is a man; the less he can receive, the less

he is a man. A man, therefore, is not made truly human by natural birth, any more than a seed is a fully grown plant. The germ of true manhood is in him from birth—indeed, before birth; but that germ needs to be developed; and his life on earth is the field for its development, the sphere in which he may, if he will, acquire a genuine and indestructible manhood. The making of man is a process which commences at conception and never ends in this world or the next.

In order to understand this process we need to know something of the spiritual organisation of man. God Himself is supremely organic, for He is the source from which all organisation is derived in creation; and His life can only flow into and animate finite beings through appropriate channels. The subject may be considered under the following heads:—

1. Life is uncreatable.
2. Life is received by finite beings according to their interior, spiritual form or organisation.
3. The truly human life cannot be received except in freedom.

1. Life is Uncreatable

I suppose that even the materialist or pantheist is prepared to accept this statement in a certain sense. For they, like the theist, have to face the problem of that which is eternal and therefore self-existent. Their objection would be to the implication that anything whatever can be created. The proposition rather comes into conflict with what was called in the last chapter the unreflecting Christian thought; which,

assuming that "to God all things are possible," sees no more difficulty in the creation of a finite life which is self-sustained than in the creation of a physical universe which is self-sustained. But this conception of life as inherent in man will not stand examination, any more than will the theory of creation *ex nihilo*. It contradicts the experience that an effect persists only so long as its causes persist, and our perception that it must be so. If we believe in immortality, it compels us to assume that there is something inherent in man which causes him to live for ever after the death of the physical body, a conception which shocks reason, for unending existence, which is an infinite attribute, cannot be the property of a finite being. But if, as Swedenborg teaches, men and all other living creatures have not the least of life in themselves, but are all spiritual and natural organic forms receptive, each in its degree, of the universal inflowing Divine life, we have no longer to regard immortality as an intrinsic or self-contained attribute of man. He is immortal because the eternal God who sustains his life now will never cease to sustain it.

What a bright light this conception throws on many little noticed passages of Scripture! "That thou mayest love the Lord thy God . . . for He is thy life" (Deut. xxx. 20); "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. viii. 3); "Who holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. lxvi. 9); "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28); "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself" (John v. 26).

Since thought began men have wondered what life

is, and they are wondering still. Swedenborg has an answer to the question which is staggering in its simplicity. Life is love. I remember the feeling of astonishment and incredulity with which I first read these words, and probably many who meet with them here for the first time will have the same feeling. Yet dispassionate reflection will, I think, show how sensible as well as simple the statement is. For what is there in our consciousness—which must necessarily furnish the data by which alone we can understand life—but first—as the universal motive—love, affection, desire; and, next, thought, in which the love expresses itself, becomes self-conscious, articulate, and determines itself to action? If we are at work on the driest and most abstract subject—say a proposition in Euclid or a sum in arithmetic—we are always impelled by some love or loves; it may be the love of learning, or of getting on in life, or of approbation, or of avoiding punishment or loss, or a combination of some or all of these. Were the motive power of affection entirely withdrawn the intellectual operations of the mind would instantly cease. Is not the whole body instinct with the love of self-preservation, so that we have not to think about winking when a grain of floating dust threatens to enter the eye, but do it automatically? What is it that constitutes the life of animals but their animal loves of food, propagation and society, and as a derivation from these the animal intelligence which guides the loves to their ends? Does a man ever feel that he is really and fully *living* unless he is in the free exercise of his affections, whatever they may be? The statement that life is love, startling as it is at first, presents itself to my mind as a consummate piece of

common sense, which reflection will tend to make more and more self-evident. If, indeed, God be essential Love, what other life can He communicate to His creatures than that which is His own?

Are we then to infer from this doctrine that malignant and poisonous animals and plants, bad men, evil spirits, the hells themselves, all live from the influx of the same Divine life? Yes. That is Swedenborg's teaching. To understand it we must pass to the next division of the subject.

2. All Life is received by Finite Beings according to their Interior, Spiritual Form or Organisation

It would, I think, be difficult to find a proposition more congruous with general experience than this. The sun sheds its rays indiscriminately on all things; yet each particular thing by means of them generates the qualities which are proper to its own nature, rottenness and stenches from the dunghill, beauty and perfume from the rose. All colour and so all visible form arise from the different modes in which objects absorb and reflect the same rays. Every beauty of nature affects the mind according to its own aptitudes and resources. A symphony of Beethoven may be an intolerable clash of discords to an ear destitute of music. The food that nourishes the healthy body causes distress if the digestion is disordered. The diseased eye is agonised by light. It is a mistake to suppose that we all see the same things even when we are looking at the same objects. We see what we are

trained to see, or have the capacity to see, and no more. The eye of the botanist sees in a wayside hedge or a square foot of moorland turf a multitude of particulars which are invisible to an untrained eye, except as a confused mass of plants. Do we ever re-peruse a great writer without detecting beauties—and perhaps defects—that we never saw before? They were there, but we wanted eyes to see them. Sir Arthur Helps said that if you hate a man he cannot wag his finger but you hate him worse for the way he does it. Ill-will perverts the most simple and innocent actions into something offensive. Good-will sees excuses, reasons for suspending harsh and final judgments, even in the worst. But it is needless to enumerate further. All that we know about the influence of one thing, animate or inanimate, on another, confirms the law that the effect is determined by the qualities of the recipient.

Why then should we find any difficulty in assenting to the proposition, "All life is received by finite beings according to their interior, spiritual form or organisation"? Most people do not think of plants as having any spiritual element involved in them. But this is an inconsistency of their thought, as we saw in the last chapter. Creation being necessarily limitation, finition of the Infinite Cause, the doctrine of discrete degrees enables us to see how the action of that Infinite can be arrested, so to speak, and by arrest manifested, at any one of these higher or lower planes; or at any limit established by the continuous degrees with which they are associated; and that thus the Divine life of love and wisdom, remaining in itself unchanged, can produce and animate the infinite variety of organic forms which exist in the natural and spiritual worlds.

3. The truly Human Life cannot be received except in Freedom

This follows of necessity if life is love. Love must be free to be love at all. Its very essence is freedom, and it demands a like freedom for its object. To attempt to force an uncongenial life on a mind not fitted to receive it, by its affections and thoughts being brought into harmony with God's, is wholly alien to the Divine Love and Wisdom: and if it were possible for God to act in such a way it would merely confound the mind into which such incongruous elements were introduced. There is a certain measure established in every human mind, partly due to heredity and circumstance, but chiefly to its own choice, which determines the amount and quality of the life that it can receive willingly or in freedom. This measure, whatever it may be, limits the exercise of free-will at any given moment, but is capable of indefinite development and increase. In the other life this measure is filled to the full and also continuously and everlastingly increased *within its own degree;* but the measure cannot be permanently exceeded. Therefore God works solely for human freedom; and, as far as possible, through human freedom. This is the chief reason why the course of the Divine Providence is so obscure.

I am anxious not to evade any problem that may be involved in this discussion; and it is probable that in the minds of some, at least, of my readers the question may have arisen, "Is there, can there be, such a thing as freedom? Is it not a mere illusion due to the fact that we are not fully aware of the causes, many of them remote, which determine our actions? And is not

this doubt rather accentuated by Swedenborg's teaching that life is love; that man *is* essentially love; that the life he receives is determined by his own nature, that is, in reality, by the state of his affections at any given moment?"

I know by experience how paralysing this doubt is, and that it exists widely in the present day. I also believe that the doubt is capable of being decisively removed, and that by very simple means.

CHAPTER XV

FREE-WILL

THE question of free-will is fundamental to religion, if religion is a means to right conduct; and if it is not that, it is, if not worthless, based on complete illusion, and may be ignored, except as an interesting by-product of the human consciousness. There can be no imperative religion, no religion justly demanding our assent and obedience, unless there be in man something that can be rightly called free-will. Let us then, first, make as sure of the fact as we can; then weigh the facts that are alleged against it; and, lastly, see exactly what Swedenborg means by the term, and the use which the faculty serves in the spiritual creation of man.

1. DOES FREE-WILL EXIST?

To decide this question we evidently need to see clearly on what grounds we believe anything whatever to be certain; and whether, on such grounds, we are entitled to regard the existence of free-will as certain. We need, in fact, some canon of certainty, or, as I should prefer to say, of certitude. By the former term I mean the absolute, unquestionable knowledge of a fact or collection of facts; by the latter, the conviction that a statement of fact, about the existence of which we have no absolute, unquestionable knowledge, is certainly true. There is a difference between these two states of mind, and an important one, that is often

not clearly perceived. We have already seen, in the chapter on "The Conflict of Truths," that the only *absolutely* certain things in our experience are our own states of consciousness. We do not, in reality, reason about these and say, *cogito, ergo sum.* We are in contact with—nay, we *are*—the fact itself. This is the only absolute certainty we have or can have, except in pure deductive reasoning, which is always a mere demonstration of facts which are implicitly contained in the abstract quantities which form its premises. But we *feel* certain, we *are*, in fact, certain, of many other things; as, for instance, of the existence of other beings besides ourselves, endowed with mental and physical qualities resembling those which we ourselves possess. This I call certitude. If any one denies the existence of other people, I cannot convict him of error. True, if he carries his solipsism so far as to treat other people as having no existence outside of his own mind, he will speedily find himself clapped into prison. But even this result would be no *proof* to him, if he were unconvinced by his general experience. This conviction is an *inference* from our own states of consciousness, and being an inference is, strictly speaking, indemonstrable. Why then am I sure that other people exist besides myself? Because I cannot think the contrary, or, in other words, because I cannot help it. Are we then never certain of a statement unless we cannot help believing it, or cannot think its contrary? Just so. We may have an opinion more or less strong, a hypothesis we are more or less inclined to adopt, an assumption we are more or less disposed to make; but we never have a firm, immovable conviction, unless we cannot help believing it, unless to think the contrary is, to us, impossible.

Life is full of such indemonstrable certitudes, and would be impossible without them. Whenever we are convinced that a person possesses such and such moral qualities, good or evil, we are in the grip of such a certitude. We all tacitly assume that the sense-impressions we derive from a given object are like the sensations which another person who is also observing it has; or so much like that the difference is trivial and may be ignored. Yet a moment's thought must convince us that we have no means whatever of verifying this assumption, except that in practice we find it works well, and that without it we should be landed in chaos. What I call red another person may, for aught I *know*, see as what I call green; but having always heard from childhood that sense-impression of green called red, he and I will be perpetually at cross-purposes—calling by the same name sense-impressions radically different—without the possibility of detecting the error into which we both unconsciously fall.

You may say this supposition is absurd. I agree. But why is it absurd? Not because its falsity is demonstrable. It is absurd because of a tacit assumption which we all make and cannot help making—for it is generated by our experience and our experience is incomprehensible without it—that we live in a world of harmony and order in which subjects are fitted to objects and fitted in much the same way. And this assumption is not in the least disturbed by the fact that different sensations may be occasioned in two different people by the same object, as in colour-blindness.

If we make this distinction between certainty and certitude, we shall see that certitude varies in degree from an assurance almost indistinguishable from cer-

tainty to a point at which it vanishes and leaves us quite undetermined whether we should think in one way or another. It will also be obvious that to demand certainty about facts concerning which only a greater or less degree of certitude is attainable is a folly; also that it would be a mistake to assume that the incertitude of to-day may not become a certitude at some future time; and, further, that certitude grows or is verified by the practical demonstration that it enables us to face the facts of life intelligently and successfully.

It is not difficult, moreover, to see the use of the distinction. Certainty is necessary for our sense-impressions, which form, so to speak, the solid foundation of all our mental operations. Mere certitude *there* would be fatal. No durable edifice could be built on a foundation which was itself unstable. But we live and act in an infinite universe, in every particular of which there is a certain image of the infinite; which can never, therefore, in any part of it, be exhaustively known. Our conceptions of it are bound to be in a perpetual process of development and rectification, or to petrify. Here certainty would be out of place. Certitude is all we need and all we can have. But certitude of what? Not that we know any fact or collection of facts exhaustively, but that our knowledge is real and trustworthy so far as it goes, although it is subject to endless modification and correction. This is, in fact, the only certitude that attaches to scientific theories. The history of science is a history of the correction of errors of observation and theory. All thoughtful scientific men admit this. And there are few of them who will not confess that there is a large element of uncertainty in most of the accepted *dicta* of Science. I find this statement in Dr. Ward's

Naturalism and Agnosticism, vol. i. p. 113: "In a lecture given about ten years ago, our foremost physicist (Lord Kelvin) said to his hearers, 'You can imagine particles of something, the thing whose motion constitutes light. This thing we call the luminiferous ether. *That is the only substance we are confident of in dynamics.* One thing we are sure of and that is *the reality and substantiality of the luminiferous ether.*'" Yet no physicist or other scientific student doubts for a moment that notwithstanding this wide field of incertitude, scientific investigation and theory are useful, enlightening and progressively reliable, in their own field of observation and generalisation.

This distinction, however, does not carry us very far. It may seem, indeed, to warrant universal scepticism; and so it does. Scepticism in the bad sense of the word is the perversion of a normal and necessary element in the activities of the human mind. In its origin it is the faculty by which we question and cross-examine our beliefs—not to overthrow them, but to insure that they do not stagnate; that they take part in that never-ending progress which the Creator designs for them.

But let us see if this canon of certitude, childishly simple as it seems, will not help us more than we might imagine in solving the problem we have now before us.

The first of certitudes is the division of our consciousness into two distinct but parallel and interacting series. One constitutes the external world, as alone known to us; the other consists of our feelings and thoughts, which appear to be, to some extent, self-evolved, and which we call *ourselves*. And, whether we be idealists or realists, we believe that this division

indicates an actual fact. The certitude that there is a real distinction between these two series cannot be rooted out of our minds. It is a certitude of the highest degree. From both these series emotions reach us—impulses to mental and physical action ; and we cannot divest ourselves of the consciousness that we are able to act upon these impulses ; that we are not merely their passive subjects, swept along helplessly by them like a piece of wood floating in a stream, but that we can, at least within certain limits, say, " I will " or " I will not " to them. Of this consciousness, I say, we cannot divest ourselves, the theoretical determinist no more than any one else. He positively cannot think the contrary, unless, perhaps, when he is trying to support his theory, and refuting it in the very act. Therefore the possession of such a controlling or, at least, resisting power over impulse is a certitude of a degree scarcely inferior to that of the distinction we draw between our internal and external ranges of consciousness.

2. Facts adduced against this Certitude

The determinist says, " We always have a motive or motives for our actions even when we suppose we are exercising what is called free-will ; and the stronger motive carries the day. The fact that it prevails proves that it is the stronger." True. So the stronger army wins. The fact that it wins shows that it was the stronger. But what made it stronger ? Was it mere numbers or equipment, or organisation or generalship ? Has not the unconquerable resolution to win or die often carried the day against great odds ? Or, if the important concomitants of military success just men-

tioned were the decisive factors, what made them to be in that decisive measure on the winning side? Was it not a stronger, more persistent and more general determination in all the constituent parts of the military system that their work should be thorough, efficient, honest; and that no solicitations of ease or pleasure should divert them from their aim? In the crises of history as in the crises of the human mind, decisive events are the result of innumerable minor crises which have been passed through with failure or success and forgotten, but have left their indelible traces on the course of events.

Moreover, every man who has fought against temptation knows that it was not the impulse that he *felt* most strongly that carried the day. The motive that was weaker in his consciousness prevailed; and it prevailed because he made it prevail by a resolute effort of will; because he *forced himself* (paradoxical as it sounds) to obey his conscience. He knows only too well how easy it is to let himself glide with the stream along which his lower nature impels him. He has, perhaps, done it again and again. Conscience may awake afterwards and reproach him, but how easy it was at the moment! This is a certitude which the man who has fought the beast in himself may have, and no other can have in like measure. For him it is a certitude the contrary of which it is impossible to think.

This reason alleged against the existence of free-will breaks down, therefore. The conception that man is the mere puppet of his emotions is opposed to the most indubitable and universal experience. We do not need, at this point, to maintain, that a man can always, or even *ever*, make his will prevail against the impulses that assail him. That is another matter

altogether. It is sufficient, for our present purpose, to be assured that he can *try* so to do. If he can do *that*, free-will exists.

But are we not then compelled to assume that something exists in the universe which is uncaused? Certainly not; except the First Cause which the materialist equally with the theist must postulate. God is the cause of human free-will. He causes the faculty, but does not determine its exercise, for to do so would be to nullify the faculty, which is the central, dominating quality which causes man to be man. The whole aim of the Divine Providence is, therefore, to lead man in freedom, or by his affections, to what is good; for to compel him would be to impair the very essence of his manhood, and frustrate the end for which he exists.

But, to more effectually lay this spectre of determinism, let us go back to the origin of things. The atheist, no less than the believer in God, has to face the problem of self-existence. He may postulate eternal matter, or an eternal God; but he must assume self-existence, underived existence of some kind. He has only the alternatives open to him of assuming the existence of an eternal substance which acts blindly and mechanically, or an eternal substance which acts consciously and intelligently. The question is which assumption is the more reasonable, the more accordant with, and explanatory of, known facts. We do not need to assume here the existence of a God of infinite love and wisdom, which is now our fundamental postulate. All that we need to know is whether something of the nature of will, intelligent self-determination to ends, exists in the First Cause. To suppose that this wonderful universe has been evolved from the merely mechanical relations of primordial atoms is foolish. As well expect to shake up a quantity

of separate letters in a bag and get from the jumble a play of Shakespeare. In fact, this idea has been abandoned by all thoughtful men, even by Haeckel; and Sir Oliver Lodge has pointed out the absurdity of Haeckel's denial of free-will in man, while he admits something of the kind in every atom. The order of the universe, therefore, speaks mind, purpose, will, in the primal substance from which it is derived. But if will exists *anywhere* in the universe, or has ever had existence, there is no *a priori* reason for disbelieving its existence in man now. The single instance is decisive of the question of possibility.

But we have not yet got to the root of the difficulty which the determinist feels. It is in the "necessity" which is supposed to account for the invariable sequences observed in natural phenomena, from which the inference is drawn that all phenomena, mental as well as physical, are caused by inevitable laws, and so that all human actions are determined. But if our conclusion that mental substances exist is valid, this inference is illegitimate. That substance being constituted by qualities perfectly distinct from those of matter, its necessity, if it is subject to any, may be of a totally different kind. It may, for instance, be a necessity of doing something, of never being inactive. But the very necessity which is invoked to extirpate the idea of the existence of free-will is itself a pure hypothesis. A thinker so clear, consistent and independent as Huxley admitted this. "Yes," it may be rejoined, "it *is* a hypothesis, but it is a hypothesis which we are obliged to make, which we cannot discharge from our minds, and which, therefore, according to your own canon, possesses the highest degree of certitude."

But this is a mistake. We *can* discharge it, or rather,

see how unfounded it may be, except as a description of what has happened and, in like circumstances, will happen again, within which modest limits it is perfectly harmless. Perhaps an illustration may help to make this clear.

Suppose an intelligent savage were allowed to examine a striking clock without being permitted to inspect its works. He would notice that on the hands reaching certain positions on the dial certain sounds were produced. He would naturally infer that the position of the hands produced the sounds, because the motion of the hands would be continuous, while the sounds would be occasional. He would be able to verify the theory in the most satisfactory manner. By watching the hands he could predict the sounds; or, if he heard the sounds without seeing the dial, he would be able to state accurately the positions of the hands. The demonstration would be complete; yet it would be erroneous. The occurrence of the two sets of phenomena at the same moment would be produced by proximate causes that were independent; they would be mere synchronisms. Now it is a perfectly intelligible and possible interpretation of the facts of the external world to suppose that they are the result in our consciousness of an order existing in a sphere of being which does not at present directly affect our consciousness in any other way. "But," it may be objected, "we do not know that any such sphere of being exists! How, then, can we assume any such relation between it and natural phenomena as you suggest?" True. I will admit that as mere observers of the facts of nature we cannot confidently assume the existence of such an unseen sphere of being, though, as I have tried to show, there are many facts which suggest that such a sphere must exist. The point I want to make

clear is this. When you deny the certitude of free-will, in its most exiguous form, namely, as a power of *trying* to do or to refrain from doing (and you must do this if you deny it at all), on the ground of this supposed necessity, you are not following the scientific method of explaining the unknown in terms of the known. You are attempting to explain, or rather to explain away, the known in terms of the unknown.

CHAPTER XVI

FREE-WILL AND PROVIDENCE

THE certainty which we feel that we possess free-will does not of itself render the faculty intelligible. To understand it, we need to see the place which the fact occupies in the system of which it forms part; for in every system, whether it be mechanical or mental, the parts are related to the whole, and cannot be understood except in their relation to it. The reason why free-will exists can be discovered only from the use which the faculty serves in the spiritual development of man; for in this way alone can we bring it into relation with the conception of a Divinely Human God, which is the central truth from which we are endeavouring to view and harmonise all the facts of life. We need, in a word, to know something of the aims and methods of that Divine Providence which uses human free-will as its means. I will, therefore, briefly state some of the chief points of Swedenborg's teaching on this subject.

1. Providence is the universal government of Divine Love and Wisdom.
2. Its sole aim is the formation of heaven out of the human race.
3. It has for its ends only things that relate to man's eternal welfare.
4. It is alike with the evil and with the good.
5. It works by means, which are processes of spiritual organisation.

6. Free-will is given to man in order that he may be able to co-operate in this process, and so become willingly receptive of the Divine life.

It seems to me that these propositions need little explanation or defence, if the postulate from which we are now reasoning be admitted. But the self-evidence of spiritual truth is usually a plant of slow growth; and that which is self-evident to one mind may not be evident at all to another. Let us then consider them in their order, and see how inevitably they flow from the conception of God as a Divine Man, of infinite love and wisdom, from whom all things exist.

1. Providence is the Universal Government of Divine Love and Wisdom

Love and wisdom are not mere attributes of God. They *are* God. They are related in Him as substance and form, or as the will and understanding in man. Love is the universal substance and motive; wisdom the universal form or the means by which love manifests itself and accomplishes its ends. All finite things being derived from the very substance and form of God, through discrete and continuous degrees of substance and form, by processes in which an inviolable order reigns, the government of the spiritual and natural universe by God is universal.

The conception of a universal or general government, as embodied in human institutions, admits the idea that there may be many particulars which escape its cognisance and control; but this is due to the limitations of human love, wisdom, and power. However earnestly a ruler may desire that justice should reign throughout

his dominions, his power to secure this result is limited. The laws themselves are imperfect. The administration of them has to be committed to officials, who may be swayed by private interest or partiality, and are liable to errors of judgment. Yet so far as any government is *only* general, and does not reach particular cases, it is a mere name. The general reign of justice is constituted by the particular cases in which justice is made to reign. As the Divine Providence has, for the accomplishment of its supreme end, to work through men who cannot be imbued with a genuine love of goodness and a clear perception of truth except with their own concurrence and by slow degrees, and also through men who cannot, because they will not, be imbued with any genuine love or wisdom at all, even of the simplest kind, a similar imperfection appears to attach to its government. But since this apparent imperfection is the indispensable condition of a greater perfection than would be attainable without it, it is not due to imperfection in the Divine Providence, but in the instruments through which it works. If God creates man as a spiritual and immortal being through his own choice between good and evil, and cannot create him in any other way, because this choice is the very essence of his manhood, it is easy to see that His Providence must be subject to limitations comparable to those which confront the human educator. A teacher of Greek or Latin might prevent his pupils from falling into errors of translation by putting cribs into their hands. He knows that to obviate error in this way would frustrate the main purpose of education, which is to call forth the latent powers of the mind. Better a thousand times incur the risk or even the certainty of mistake rather than impair development. Even the education of the body—which is, in fact, a kind of

mental education—follows the same law. A child, when learning to walk, is likely to fall and hurt himself. Strap him into a chair and he will not fall, but neither will he ever walk. His physical well-being depends on liberty, with all its attendant possibilities of error and danger. The Divine Providence is an unceasing and unchangeable purpose to educe the best possible results, for the individual and the race, out of that nature, whether good or evil, which every man makes his own during his life on earth by the exercise of his free-will. Its perfection lies in the universality and impartiality of this purpose. There is no element of human life, however insignificant it may appear, which is beyond its scope.

2. The Sole Aim of the Divine Providence is the Formation of Heaven out of the Human Race

Love desires to give itself to its object, and to be freely reciprocated by it. The purest, most unselfish love longs for a return; not only for its own sake, but because, without this, the person on whom it is bestowed misses the very soul of the gift; for he is destitute of true gratitude, which is a heartfelt perception of the beauty and worth of unselfish love, apart from any consideration of personal benefit derived from it. Love is frustrated unless it can win an answering love. God being Love, cannot but desire to have objects to whom He may communicate His own blessedness, by forming them into likenesses of Himself, and infusing into them His life. He cannot but desire that His love shall be returned by man, for in loving God man loves all that is good. Divine wisdom perceives how this can be accomplished through human freedom, and through this alone. The material universe is the basis of this spiritual

creation; for on this plane only can men be brought into existence and prepared for heaven; nature being, as it were, the mould in which the natural mind is formed, and the natural mind, the mould in which the higher spiritual mind is formed, which is capable of living in heaven.[1] The material universe, therefore, will never cease to exist, for it is the nursery and school of heaven. The gates of heaven will never be closed. Heaven can never be full. It is as boundless, potentially, as the Divine Love and Wisdom from which it exists.

3. The Divine Providence has for its Ends only Things that relate to Man's Eternal Welfare

This follows of necessity, if God is infinite Love and Wisdom, and the quality of man's life to eternity is determined by the way in which he exercises his free-will during his life on earth. For what value can there be in things merely temporal compared with things eternal? If a boy's success in life depended on his conduct during a single day, would his father care whether he spent the day pleasantly or not? Would he care whether the child had his favourite toys to play with, and the things he liked best to eat? Would not his sole anxiety be that his boy's conduct should be such as to secure the life-long good? If he had the power of influencing the child's conduct, would not all his efforts be devoted to this end? If momentary worldly satisfactions are, to any reasoning mind, matters of indifference when compared with permanent satisfactions, they must both sink into absolute insignificance

[1] "Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 46, 47, R.V.).

compared with good that is eternal. If God is infinite Love and Wisdom, and if there are results affecting man's eternal welfare involved in all the circumstances of human life, He cannot regard any of those circumstances except as they are related to that welfare. Temporal things are, indeed, wholly under the control of the Divine Providence. All the circumstances, inward and outward, which make up the sum of human life—that is, all the things in man which are extraneous to free-will—are as to their minutest particulars determined so as to subserve man's eternal welfare. It is impossible for anything to exist from the infinite God which does not directly or indirectly subserve some eternal end. But temporal satisfactions and dissatisfactions are not, in themselves, ends of the Divine Providence. They are means. God does not give prosperity to the good because they are good, nor adversity to the evil because they are evil. He gives to all impartially that which is best for them, with a view only to their eternal well-being. "Not as the world giveth give I unto you."

4. The Divine Providence is alike with the Wicked and with the Good

This is inevitable if God is infinite Love. Shakespeare says, in one of the most beautiful of his sonnets—

> Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.

If this be true of the best human love, how absolutely true must it be of infinite Love! It is impossible for any man, by any wickedness, however atrocious or deter-

mined, to exclude himself from the all-embracing control of the Divine love and wisdom. Infinite love cannot be changed into ill-will by man's abuse of the powers which it has bestowed upon him for his good. It may *seem* to be changed; but the cause of the apparent change is always in the percipient. The eternal hostility of Divine love and wisdom to every form of evil, its unalterable aim to extirpate it by every possible means, would make it appear to the man who loves his evils and does not wish to be delivered from them, like hatred, if he thought about it at all. But it is still, in the severest sufferings it permits, unchanged, unchangeable love. We have to learn, if we have not yet learnt, that wise love is the strictest, the most inexorable, though, also, the gentlest of things. Wise parental love could, in case of need, stretch its child on the operating table, in spite of its cries. Love can direct the surgeon's knife and make him seem and, indeed, for the moment, be insensible to the pain he is inflicting, through his absorption in the ultimate good at which he aims. Blind, personal affection will often indulge when indulgence is hurtful. Wise love will not. Divine love is stern. The sufferings of the wicked in the other life, and often in this, in consequence of their wickedness, are great. The sufferings of the good are often great in this life, and also in the other, while they are being divested of the impure affections which have clung to them during their earthly life. But all these sufferings are permitted and controlled by a wisdom, which sees infallibly the results which can be attained through them, and in no other way. "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth MERCY, for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps. lxii. 12).

Not only is the Divine Providence equally with the wicked and the good, it is, in itself, the same. It is

always an unalterable, undeviating purpose to save man; to save him from evil and lead him to heaven or the love of good, and when he is in heaven to lead him to a better heaven; to preserve him from hell, or a confirmed love of evil; or, if he cannot be restrained from hell, to withhold him from plunging into a worse hell, to which of himself he inclines. Whatever a man's state may be, in this world or the next, the Divine Providence enfolds him with an inexhaustible love and mercy; always works and provides for his amelioration. Yet the limits imposed by the way in which a man has exercised his free-will during his life on earth remain as conditions which cannot be contravened, even by the Divine Providence. He is that which he has chosen to be, and the consequences of his choice cannot be evaded. What he has sown that he must reap. Hell cannot be changed into heaven in the other life.

5. The Divine Providence works by Means

We have already seen that the contrary of this proposition—namely, that Divine Power can produce any result by a mere *fiat*—is untenable.[1] It is discountenanced by experience; for in the natural world—which is the work of God and must, therefore, exhibit His mode of working—process reigns everywhere. It bars rational thought, which is necessarily a thought of process, and so makes religion unintelligible. It impugns the Divine goodness; for if the permission of evil is not necessary for the attainment of some good which, without such permission, would be unattainable, we are compelled to regard God as responsible for human evil, since He could have prevented its existence without any bad

[1] See *ante*, p. 125.

result, had He chosen to do so; and we cannot reconcile this with perfect goodness.

The mind of man is as organic as his body; all the functions of his body being, indeed, images, in a material form, of spiritual processes which take place in his mind. Human society is organic, as most students of sociology admit. The spiritual world as a whole is organic, constituted of related parts, the specific functions of which contribute to the welfare of the whole. Every society of the spiritual world, large or small, and every inhabitant of such a society, is organic in the same way. And the organisation of the whole and of each part has the same use—to render the organic unit, whether it be on the largest scale or the smallest, willingly receptive of the Divine life of unselfish use. This willing reception is the end for which free-will is given. Freedom is the essential human faculty on which alone heaven in the individual and heaven as a whole can be founded. But it necessarily involves the power of loving and doing evil, or the possible existence of hell.

CHAPTER XVII

THE USE OF FREE-WILL

THE nature and laws of the Divine Providence are the fundamental problem of religion. If anything comprehensive, consistent and satisfying can be known on this subject, it will constitute the only intellectual knowledge of God which it is possible for the human mind to possess. There is, indeed, a deeper knowledge—a knowledge of the heart—which cannot be attained by any merely intellectual process, and without which any merely intellectual enlightenment will be fruitless and evanescent. But at present we have to deal with an intellectual problem only; the removal of the difficulties which are apt to beset our minds when we meditate on Providence, even with a sincere desire to believe in the existence of a Divine government of the world.

The brief summary of Swedenborg's teaching on this subject given in the last chapter will at least have sufficed to establish a marked difference between it and the ideas generally entertained on the subject; but it will probably have suggested some difficulties of its own. If Providence is the universal government of Divine Love and Wisdom, we are relieved, on the one hand, from the obscurity and confusion resulting from the prevalent conceptions, which, I think, may be fairly described as involving a *general* superintendence of human affairs by Divine Providence with *occasional* intervention in them; but, on the other hand, we seem to be confronted with the problem of the relation of God to human evil in the

most perplexing and apparently insoluble form. If its sole aim is the formation of heaven out of the human race, and it has for its ends only things that relate to man's eternal welfare, these truths compel us to take up a totally new point of view for the whole problem. Our old *criteria* become worthless. A new "apparatus of thought" must be sought adequate to the new outlook.

Before attempting to define this apparatus of thought, let us briefly sum up some of the results of previous chapters which have a direct relation to this new outlook.

1. If a Divinely Human God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, creation must have an end or purpose.
2. No end more worthy of Infinite love and wisdom can be conceived than a boundless and ever-growing heaven, fed from the created universe and inhabited by human beings who have been brought into some degree of likeness to their Creator and can be made increasingly happy for ever in doing good to others.
3. Reasoning *a priori* and from analogy, we may infer that the truths relating to conduct which are essential to man's self-preparation for heaven will be of the simplest kind, while the processes by which the ends intended by the Divine Providence are accomplished will involve profound mysteries, only dimly penetrable by human reason; just as the actions by which physical life is sustained, such as eating, breathing and voluntary motion, are perfectly simple, but involve processes that are indescribably wonderful and defy exhaustive investigation.

These spiritual processes we must now try to follow; and it is important that we should commence our inquiry with a clear conception of the extent of our inevitable ignorance and of our possible enlightenment. Otherwise we may demand impossibilities, and get no response such as might be elicited by a sober recognition of the limits of our powers.

And, first, as to our inevitable ignorance. We cannot understand any human action except so far as we are able to understand the purpose for which it is done and the fitness of the means employed to attain it. If a person wholly ignorant of surgery had witnessed a serious operation on a child before the discovery of anæsthetics, he would have been unable to distinguish the act from one of inhuman cruelty. Yet it might be dictated by the truest mercy. The surgeon and his assistants might know that if they yielded to the natural impulse of pity, and spared the child the pain involved in the operation, the result would be early death or permanent disablement. The apparent pity would have been real cruelty, while the apparent cruelty was enlightened pity. The fact that our minds are finite debars us from a comprehension of the purposes contemplated and the means used by the Divine Providence in particular cases. We do not know the state of any mind, at any given moment, as to its fitness or unfitness for heaven, nor how its states are modified by means of the spiritual and natural circumstances into which it is brought. Still less can we discern the remote consequences of the changes so induced, and least of all the ultimate results on the organic constitution of that mind and the influence which it may exert consciously or unconsciously on other minds with which it is destined to be temporarily or permanently associated. All these things, to the

minutest particulars involved, are within the scope of the Divine Providence. They cannot be fully within the purview of any created being. The operations of the Infinite Mind must be in large measure inscrutable to the finite.

If no further explanation than this were available, we might be protected from a rash denial of the existence of any Divine Providence, but should be unable to form any definite ideas about it. But the problem is not left in this ambiguous position. Human love and wisdom at their best resemble Divine love and wisdom, because they are derived from it and are its finite images. They therefore supply us with symbols by which the Divine Providence may be conceived and understood; symbols utterly inadequate, it is true, but inadequate only because the finite mind is incapable of grasping infinitude. They are inadequate not because they are too good to be true, but because they are not good and true enough. And these inadequate conceptions are capable of endless development and progress; so that our thoughts about God and His Providence may for ever be growing in truth, though the whole truth can never be completely grasped.

Swedenborg's teaching enables us to see clearly how all the *classes* of events which occasion our difficulties are of use in the spiritual development of man, and thus makes it easy to believe that similar events always have similar uses, although we may not be able to discern what those uses are. It also shows us that the ends contemplated by the Divine Providence require that its operations should be deeply concealed behind the series of apparently natural events. We are therefore left somewhat in the mental position of an intelligent man, almost wholly ignorant of anatomy,

physiology or surgery, whose general knowledge, combined with confidence in his medical advisers, nevertheless enables him with full concurrence of his reason to submit to a painful operation. Where his knowledge is defective he trusts to those who are wiser than himself. The result of this kind of explanation is not so much to remove obscurity as to remove obstacles. If such a general knowledge of the methods of Divine Providence is sufficiently extensive, and is received in a humble mind, the facts which formerly perplexed a man will cease to exist as difficulties, although he may understand the particular effects they are intended to accomplish and how they accomplish them no better than he did before.

We want now to see *how* it is that free-will contributes to that spiritual reorganisation of the human mind which fits it for heaven. In this investigation we shall have to face a difficulty arising out of the first proposition,[1] which has probably occurred to every thoughtful reader. Does not the doctrine that the Divine Providence governs *all things*, good as well as evil, practically annihilate free-will? Granting that man possesses free-will, it would seem that according to Swedenborg's teaching he has no power whatever of independent or self-originated action. All his actions are performed by power derived from God, and are also in their minutest details controlled by Him. How, then, can we escape from the conclusion that evil acts as well as good ones are in reality acts of God? Are we not involved in the very difficulty which was described in a former chapter as fatal to that form of Pantheism which seeks to maintain a real distinction between good and evil?

[1] See *ante*, p. 152.

In order to solve this difficulty we need to bear in mind these three principles :

1. God is the cause of free-will in the sense that the faculty exists from moment to moment by His creation ; but He does not determine the way in which man exercises it, for this would nullify the faculty.
2. The only essential and eternal element in any action is the motive or love from which it springs, and which it confirms and develops, or weakens and displaces.
3. The Divine Providence permits such evil intentions to pass into act as cannot be prevented from so passing without detriment to man's eternal welfare.

The first of these principles needs merely to be stated here. The second is our present subject.

It has been commonly assumed by religious thinkers that free-will was given to man to enable him to do or refrain from doing certain definite acts which are enjoined or forbidden by God ; that a record was kept of man's lapses from obedience, and that Divine justice required that punishment should be inflicted on the offender proportioned to the gravity of the offence. There is much in the letter of Scripture to justify these conceptions. They were doubtless the best which men in past ages could form of Divine laws, and of the consequences of disobedience to them. Such ideas were formed after the analogy of human laws, the infringement of which is visited with punishments that seldom have any necessary relation to the offence, and are awarded by a judgment which takes little account of those innumerable collateral circumstances which

may make similar acts grave in one case and comparatively venial in another. It was the best conception of the law of spiritual retribution which the human mind was then capable of grasping. Penal consequences do attach to every infringement of Divine laws, whether it take place only in the mind, or find expression in acts of the body. But the consequences are not extrinsic to the offence, but inherent in it. The penalty is a strengthening of the evil affections which suggested and essentially constituted the act, and consequently of the propensity to like transgressions. There is no record kept of a man's actions, good or evil, outside of himself. He himself is the book which is opened and out of which he is judged. But the result in the other life is much the same as if a record external to himself had been kept, and reward or penalty apportioned according to it. For at death man passes into the eternal world with all his interior affections formed exactly according to the choice he has made by the deliberate acts of his will and understanding during his life on earth. When the process of judgment, or the disclosure of his essential states of affection or will, is completed, he appears openly, without either the desire or power of concealment, as he had inwardly willed and striven to be and do during his life in the world. The reward of a good man is that very love of unselfish usefulness which has become his acquired nature, and which can now be filled with all the delights of use which it is capable of receiving. The penalty of the wicked man is in those depraved loves which have become *his* acquired nature, and which impel him to acts injurious to others, from which he can now be restrained only by the fear of punishment. Thus the deeper the love of evil into which

he has plunged himself, the severer will be the punishments by which he must be restrained.

We may, therefore, make the third proposition stated in the last chapter more definite by saying, "The Divine Providence has for its end only the formation of good affections in man." For the affections are dominant in man, and ultimately determine both what he thinks and what he does. Right conduct is, therefore, the purpose or end for which free-will is given; but it is right conduct from affection which is finally intended, not a mere conformity to an externally imposed law. And endeavour after right conduct on man's part is the means to this end, because only through this can those new affections be implanted in him which while they transform his nature from top to bottom yet leave him still *himself*, still free, a willing and not a compelled or hired instrument of Divine service.

If this fact be firmly grasped it will be seen that freedom cannot be destroyed, need not even be impaired, as to its essential use, by any reign of law in spheres external to itself. We cannot contravene the physical order of nature. Does this annul our freedom? Not in the least. Our free-will uses that order as a means to its ends, by adapting itself to its known laws. Carrying the thought into a higher sphere, it is surely easy to see that the tendencies to evil due to heredity and social environment, which exist in every one, do not at all impair the reality of free-will. Whether those tendencies are apparently strong or apparently weak —as to which we are apt to judge very erroneously— the mind remains equally free in the attitude which it is able to assume towards them, as favouring or resisting them. There are only two conditions essential to this freedom:

1. A recognition not derived merely from the assertions of others but one's own perception, of something in the mind *as an evil.*
2. A power of will adequate to resistance.

Where either of these conditions is wanting responsibility does not exist. A man cannot resist any impulse as evil, or as a sin against God, unless he knows and perceives it to be an evil; nor can he overcome evil unless the strength of his will is adequate to the struggle with it. These conditions exist in every sane man, as to some part of his nature, sufficiently to enable him to do what is necessary to be done on his part, in order that the work of regeneration, which is wholly Divine and consists in forming new affections for good within him, may be accomplished.

The truth that the formation of the affections is the aim of the Divine Providence enables us to remove out of the way a difficulty that is often felt to be formidable—the great difference in the circumstances, hereditary, educational and social, in which different individuals are placed. One man is endowed with a good natural disposition; placed in easy circumstances and thus shielded from many of the temptations which beset the poor, and carefully and judiciously trained from infancy, so that good habits are formed in him almost insensibly. Another is born in the slums; surrounded from infancy by violence, intemperance and obscenity; his bad passions inflamed and encouraged by his elders and companions. How much more favourable from the point of view of a spiritual prognosis does the position of the one appear as compared with that of the other! If the eternal destiny of the two were to be decided by their outward acts,

it would be incomparably more favourable. The one comes into possession, when he enters on adult life, of a fertile estate, long subjected to cultivation and ready to yield abundant harvests to intelligence and industry. The other inherits a field, not perhaps naturally barren, but deteriorated by neglect and full of weeds. If the two were to be judged by the crops they produced at the moment of entering on their inheritance, the one would indeed be at a hopeless disadvantage as compared with the other. But if the criterion is the love of achieving useful results, of improving methods and overcoming difficulties, we have to pause in our judgment. The facility and even the success with which any work is accomplished are no measure of the strength and worth of the affections which are at the back of the effort. Let one student of the violin of good ability have the best tuition, ample time for practice, and possession of a fine Strad, and another of equal talent have to teach himself in his intervals of leisure by means of a guinea fiddle, and we can easily guess which would be likely to carry off the prize in a competition. But if the criterion be a pure love of music for its own sake and as a means of promoting the happiness of others, who shall decide which condition is the more favourable? Children often show in their play how little abundance has to do with the development of the affections; how often, indeed, it seems to check their growth and with it that of real and lasting pleasure. The children of the rich, who "have everything they can wish for," often feel but little delight in their toys. The novelty of them pleases for the moment, but as soon as this wears off they are thrown aside as worthless. The children of the poor, on the contrary, often find a source of

perennial delight in the most unhopeful-looking objects. A doll made of a stick and some rags may have a wealth of childish love lavished on it such as the pampered child of luxury never knows.

In looking at the wider nursery of human life we are apt to be misled as to the circumstances which are favourable or unfavourable to the development of the spiritual nature. Difficulty of accomplishment is not necessarily an impediment. It is sometimes a stimulus. Easiness is not in itself an advantage. It often develops indolence and conceit.

To form any judgment at all on the subject we should have to possess an exhaustive knowledge of the hereditary and acquired states of the mind under examination, from which we are necessarily debarred. But we can see this much—that favourable circumstances are very apt to blind a man to his own spiritual state, to foster pride and self-complacency, and so disincline him to undertake that earnest struggle against the more subtle evils of his nature which is no less necessary for him, than struggle against grosser forms of evil is for his seemingly less favoured brother.

The evils that are gross, open, palpable, especially if they spring from mere lusts of the flesh, are not the worst evils; they do not corrode and corrupt the nature as much as those which work, unseen by mortal eyes, in the recesses of a man's nature. Only He who sees all things from the beginning, and their endless consequences, can apportion to every man the experience which is best for him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COMPLEX MIND

THE consent and co-operation of man are necessary for his regeneration or preparation for heaven, because this process consists in the creation in him of new affections, which cannot be done without the displacement of the old; and the old affections, which constitute his very life, cannot be removed without his consent, so as to leave him still himself. It is obvious that under these conditions even omnipotent love and wisdom must incur disabilities and limitations comparable to those which hamper the work of a human educator. Compulsion being useless, in order that man may be able to attain the highest perfection of which a finite being is capable, it must resort to persuasion, accompanied by such a regulation of the circumstances, spiritual and natural, of man's life on earth, as may bring the strongest influences to bear upon him in favour of the choice on which his eternal welfare depends. As each individual of the race is unique, being indeed compounded of like passions with other men, but these mingled in a way that is peculiar to himself, these influences will not be exactly the same in any two cases. Only a general idea of their nature and efficacy can be obtained; but even for this we need to know something of the constitution of the human mind, which is the scene of the operations of the Divine Providence, and exhibits the conditions and limitations under which its work has to be accomplished.

A full statement of the psychology involved in Swedenborg's teaching would require a separate treatise. Something has been said on the subject in connection with the doctrine of degrees. A few further particulars must be added in order to render the subject now under consideration intelligible. I shall simply give the substance of Swedenborg's teaching without attempting to justify it. Our acceptance of it will depend chiefly on the judgment we form as to the nature of his experience of the spiritual world, and the reliability of the information we derive from it; for it deals with facts which are to a large extent beyond the reach of ordinary observation or criticism.

Every reader will have perceived that one of the principal foundations of all Swedenborg's teaching is the fact, made known to him by experience, that the mind of man is that very body which survives physical death and enters the spiritual world. This spiritual body is a most complex organism. It consists of five[1] distinct degrees or correlated grades of organised spiritual substance, each of which is capable of being formed into a complete mind, possessing a will, understanding, and consequent activity peculiar to itself, while each remains in indissoluble organic and functional union with the other degrees above or below itself. The higher or more interior degrees can operate upon the lower and so affect them; but the lower cannot operate upon the higher, though they modify their activity. The best image which the physical world affords of these distinct yet intimately associated, co-operative degrees is the nervous, vascular, muscular, and osseous systems in the human body. Each of

[1] In this enumeration the natural mind is treated as constituting one degree. It really consists of three.

these, if extracted and exhibited separately, would present a more or less perfect representation of the human shape. Each performs distinct, homogeneous functions, all of which are indispensable to the activity and maintenance of the whole.

The lowest of these degrees is the "natural" mind; that mind of which man is conscious during his life on earth, and through which, therefore, his co-operation with the aims of the Divine Providence on his behalf must be effected. Above or within this is the first degree of the "spiritual" mind; above this the second, and above this the third; the latter being the highest degree which can become the seat of consciousness even in the other life. Above this there is an inmost and supreme degree which is the very habitation of the Lord in man, and through which Divine influences descend directly into the lower ranges of his mind.

Each of these degrees, except the highest, is capable of becoming the seat of consciousness; but the consciousness of one degree involves the unconsciousness of all the others. The lowest or natural degree is, as has been said, the seat of consciousness during man's earthly life. But this degree of mind being permeated with ideas of space and time, although it is not itself subject to these conditions, is not capable of entering heaven. To attain this consummation one or more of the higher degrees must have become organised and active. The interior, spiritual degrees exist in every man from birth, and indeed from conception, but in a rudimentary form; each being capable of development into a full humanity of its own order, but not as yet thus developed. Their development depends on the use which man makes of the natural

powers of which he *is* conscious, and to which, therefore, his voluntary activity is restricted. Briefly, this activity, so far as it contributes to the development of his higher spiritual faculties, consists in a resolved endeavour to regulate his life by principles which he himself acknowledges and perceives to be true. According to the quality and quantity of this effort is the development of the higher degrees of his mind, which is solely the work of the Divine Providence, but is rendered possible only by what he does in the natural mind, which is his proper sphere of work.

Each of the three spiritual degrees is characterised by a special love united to appropriate truths. In each degree there is in different men illimitable variety both in the affections and the truths which are associated with them; but this variety does not abrogate the fundamental similarity and distinctness of the affection prevailing in each, nor, consequently, prevent the formation of a heaven perfectly separate from the others, out of men in whom these affections are dominant. The love proper to the first degree of the spiritual mind is that of obedience. Those in whom this love becomes predominant have not during their life on earth been very solicitous to be instructed in spiritual things; but they have had no aversion to them. They have striven to shun what they perceived to be wrong and to do right, and there has thus been formed within them a genuine conscience. The love proper to the second degree is the love of truth: not merely a love of thinking or talking about it, nor even of understanding and admiring it, but a love of obeying it: there has thus been formed within them a conscience of a higher order: those in whom this love has become predominant enter the second heaven. The love proper to the third degree is the pure

love of good for its own sake, to which all truth is merely subservient: those in whom this love has become predominant have passed through the forms of conscience proper to the lower degrees and left them behind: they enter the third or inmost heaven, which Swedenborg calls, as it were *par excellence*, the celestial heaven.

Though each degree of the spiritual mind is characterised by a specific love resembling that of the heaven to which it corresponds, all these loves are capable of manifesting themselves in the natural mind, though in doing so they necessarily put on a lower form, the higher degrees when fully developed and active being of incomparably greater perfection than the lower. Of this superiority even the man in whom the higher degrees are developed is not at all aware during his life on earth, since his consciousness then resides solely in the natural degree of his mind. The latter, however, may be and is profoundly modified by the influence of the superior degrees. Indeed, it cannot be radically affected by any other means.

It will be seen that this doctrine implies the existence in every human being of several distinct potential manhoods; each endowed with the rudiments of its own peculiar form of affection, intellect, and resulting action. This conception, though unfamiliar, ought not to create any difficulty in a mind that has once grasped the fact that the natural mind itself is, at least, duplex; that there is an element in it which is purely animal, and another that is specifically human; and that the functions and consequently the organic constitution of the two are distinct and incommensurable. If there are degrees in the mind of which we are conscious, why should there not be others in that part of the mind of which we are at present unconscious?

The spiritual degrees of the mind are developed exactly according to a man's endeavour after faithful obedience to the truths which he himself knows and acknowledges. There is no development of any higher degree except through the development of the proximately lower. The love of obedience, the love of obeying truth, and the love of good for its own sake, must succeed each other in the natural mind itself, in order that the development of the higher degrees may be effected. During this process there is a constant action and reaction going on between the higher degrees as they become developed, and the lower. Every sincere effort after good in the natural mind renders possible a development in the higher degrees; and this renders possible a more powerful influence from the higher into the lower, tending to reveal and subdue evil tendencies there; and this goes on continuously and progressively through life, if a sincere endeavour to use aright the powers with which the natural mind is endowed be maintained to the end.

If a man makes no effort to bring his natural mind into order by means of the perceptions of truth he possesses, a precisely opposite process takes place. He first confirms in himself the evil which is hereditary with him by simply neglecting the truths he possesses which are capable of enlightening him, to some extent, at least, as to the nature of that evil. He passes into a state which is the exact opposite of the simple good characteristic of the first heaven. It is not, at first, a state of active disobedience. He merely feels the restraints of religion irksome, and keeps them out of his mind as much as possible. He does not, as yet, perhaps, deny the fundamental truths of religion, but is unwilling to give them serious attention. Some later period of life, he thinks,

will be time enough for that. It is rather a state of spiritual indolence and *laisser faire* than an active love of falsity or evil. He simply lets things slide.

But, unless he repents, a further fall threatens him. The evils he indulges suggest to him falsities which seem to justify or at least excuse them. He cherishes those falsities, weaves them into a system, and exerts all his ingenuity to make them appear reasonable. He practises what he preaches to himself; and becomes gradually imbued with the love of falsity leading to evil, the opposite of the love of the second heaven.

A deeper fall even than this threatens the man who has travelled thus far on the downward road. He may become possessed by the love of evil for its own sake, the opposite of the love of the highest heaven. He makes evil his good and good his evil. He no longer merely opposes spiritual truth, but loathes it.

It is important that we should have a clear idea of these actual and potential degrees of the mind, and their relation to each other, because without this nearly everything which we are taught about the three heavens and the three hells will be but dimly intelligible. Perhaps our imaginations may be helped by an illustration of a rather fairy-tale kind. We need not be ashamed to be helped in this way; for fairy tales must have their roots deep down in human nature, or they would not endure as they do.

Imagine, then, that man during his life on earth lives in the ground floor only of a magic house; and that in proportion that he devotes himself to the work of introducing order, cleanliness, and beauty into it, an unseen power, without his knowledge, constructs one, two, or three upper floors and prepares them, one after the other, for his future habitation. At death he leaves

his ground floor, which he sees no more, and passes into the highest of the upper floors which has become habitable, where he finds all that he has done below reproduced with a perfection infinitely surpassing anything he could have achieved by his own efforts, or even have imagined. This is his "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." But the ground floor, though he sees it no more, is still there—the basis of the whole superstructure. In this sense and no other a man's "works do follow him."

This represents what happens if a man persists, and especially if he persists with ever increasing ardour, in the effort to regulate his natural powers by such truths as he knows. But what if he does not persist, or, when he reaches adult life, makes no such effort, but allows his ground floor to fall into a condition of neglect, disorder, and decay? In this case, underneath his ground floor the same invisible power excavates one, two, or three cellars, one beneath the other, where his neglect and disorder are reproduced in forms unimaginable by him. At death he passes into one or other of these cellars—the highest in which he is able to be normally at ease, because it is congenial to his state.

It may, perhaps, be thought that the illustration fails when it represents both the upper stories and the cellars as the work of the same invisible hand. But it is not so. The hells as well as the heavens are governed as to their minutest details by the Lord—not that He wills that any one should be in hell, but because the states of bad men are such that hell alone can be the means of inducing them to comply with the laws of external order.

The final condition of every human being, the highest angel equally with the worst of devils, depends on the spiritual nearness to the Lord *which he is able to endure*.

The angels of the highest heaven cannot endure the unveiled ardour and splendour of Divine Love and Wisdom. Even they have to be protected by enveloping media which temper the light and heat of heaven to such a degree that they are able to bear it. An angel of a lower heaven if removed to a higher, would be unable to perceive its delights and would be ill at ease, because the influx of love and wisdom exceeded his receptive capacity. What, then, would happen to those who are immersed in the love of evil unless they were protected by still thicker and thicker enveloping media, according to the depth of their immersion? They would be in continual torment, in which nothing could be done for their amendment.

The natural mind of man is not at this day and has not been for ages past in the state for which it was designed by the Creator, and into which it was once brought by the process of spiritual education recorded in the first chapter of Genesis. Then it contained, indeed, a faculty which was intrinsically adverse to God, or rather, tended of itself towards forgetfulness of God; for it contained that sense of independent, self-regulative, self-sufficient life which was indispensable to man's existence as a rational being, capable of yielding himself to God; but the misuse of which became the source of all evil. This faculty, which Swedenborg calls man's proprium—that which is his own—his selfhood—was not then saturated with tendencies to evil as it is at the present day. These tendencies come from the long process of spiritual declension which constituted the Fall of man. Beginning with the mere attribution to himself of the goodness and truth which he possessed, this initial lapse from Divine order led gradually to grosser forms of evil, and at last to a complete destruc-

tion of genuine religion, and thus of all that constitutes heaven in man. For every evil practised by man from affection and ratified by his judgment descends to his offspring in the form of tendencies to similar evils and falsities; tendencies for which, be it remembered, the man who inherits them is not responsible, and for which he is subject to no penalty in the other life. But he *is* responsible for the attitude which he deliberately assumes towards those evils, so far as he is aware of their existence, as favouring or resisting them. The use of the transmission of hereditary qualities from parents to children is that the spiritual attainments of mankind may not be limited to the generation which achieves them, but may be transmitted to their descendants in the form of inherited good dispositions; thus enabling them to take up the spiritual warfare at a higher level and carry victory into new provinces; somewhat as the laborious investigations of scientific men enable later students to run rapidly along the road they so slowly and painfully prepared, and commence their researches where their predecessors left off. This is the primary, Divine use of heredity. But it necessarily involves the transmission of evil inclinations as well as good.

As the course of the spiritual history of mankind has for long ages been, on the whole, downwards, the natural mind in the present day is so full of tendencies to the evils of self-love and the love of the world that, in itself, as it is by nature, it may be described as nothing but evil. This is the "body of death" from which man must be delivered if he is to become an inhabitant of heaven.

If there were nothing in the natural mind to counterbalance this mass of evil tendency, the state of man would be hopeless. In every man without exception,

whether he be born of good or of wicked parents, whether in a Christian or a heathen land, such a counterbalance is provided. From the very initiament of the human being a rudiment is provided in the natural mind of that new nature, made in the image of God, which he may afterwards, if he will, use to resist and overcome the evils to which he is naturally prone. These tender germs of good are fostered by the innocent love for parents, teachers, and companions which is characteristic of early childhood. It is these which, if the child is at all well brought up, enable it to accept, after its own childish fashion, the truths of individual, social, and even religious life in which it may be instructed, and thus form a rudimentary and immature conscience. In adult life the man's free-will stands, as it were, between these two opposing forces and chooses which it will serve. The office of the Divine Providence is to aid a right choice, but in no case to compel it; for this would annul true manhood and defeat the end for which man is created. Man does his part when he shuns the evils he sees in himself as sins. The Lord then can do His part by bringing that initiament of true humanity which is in man from birth to its full stature, by subduing his affections for evil and implanting affections for good, and by bringing those interior degrees of his mind, of which he is totally unconscious, to the utmost perfection that the state of his natural mind permits. All this is a work purely Divine. Man has no part or lot in it, except in providing the conditions which make it possible.

The sphere of the operations of the Divine Providence —the problem, so to speak, with which it is confronted —is thus brought into clear view. It is simply to induce man, by every possible means, to make a right

choice between the two sets of opposing influences which he finds co-existing in himself; the one inclining him to favour goodness and the truths by which it is enlightened and directed; the other inclining him to favour self-love and the pleas by which it may be justified. We have now to see how the permission of evil is a means in the hands of the Divine Providence of assisting a man to make his choice aright.

It must be remembered that the possibilities depending on man's choice are manifold. It is not merely a question of entering heaven or hell, but also of what he is when he enters that particular heaven or hell which is to be his final abode. He may enter any one of the three heavens with a relatively great or small capacity for the uses and consequently the blessedness characteristic of that heaven. Similarly he may enter any one of the three hells with a relatively profound or comparatively superficial love of its evil and falsity. Any experience whatever, therefore, which either leads a man to heaven, or to a higher heaven, or to higher usefulness in that heaven than he would otherwise attain, or that on the other hand restrains a man from plunging into a deeper hell, or from becoming more profoundly imbued with the love characteristic of the hell which must be his abode, will be a *good* and an end of the Divine Providence.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

THE evils—using the term in the widest sense—which perplex thoughtful men, and cause them to doubt the existence of any Divine government of human life, may be divided into two main categories—spiritual and natural. The former includes all purposes and acts which spring from an impulse to gratify self at the expense of others, or to indulge one's lower propensities in despite of the obligation which every one feels in *some* sphere of his life to shun such indulgence. All these impulses originate in the love of self, which disposes a man to regard himself as accountable to no one, and to treat all other people as worth consideration only so far as they can be made to minister to his own happiness. Natural evil includes all physical suffering caused by privation, poverty, disease, and accident, and all mental distress about worldly concerns, such as arises from injured self-love, disappointments, and losses of various kinds. The former category perhaps presents the difficulty we are considering in the more perplexing form. We will, therefore, take that first.

Granting the existence of *free intention* on the part of man, and consequently the possible existence in him of evil intention, I suppose it must be obvious that a world in which action was *never* permitted to follow evil intention is inconceivable. It would be a world in which intentions would be constantly frus-

trated by some inscrutable force which reduced them to impotence. How deeply would men rebel against that unseen power which brought their cherished purposes to nought, and surrounded them as with an invisible wall through which they found it impossible to pass! Such a restraint, moreover, would be altogether harmful. Evil intentions, deprived of their vent in action, would corrupt the mind far more deeply and rapidly than they do when actions flowing to all appearance naturally from them are permitted. The pent-in love of evil would be like vitiated states of the blood prevented from discharging themselves in the superficies of the body. Boils and ulcers are ugly things; but they are efforts of nature to get rid of morbid conditions which would be far more hurtful if they were deprived of an outlet. So evil, without the safety valve of action, would be more malignant and destructive of the spiritual nature than it is. The permission of evil acts as a palliative. The evil intention, having free play, discharges itself. The tension is relieved. The mind is restored to equilibrium and can review its acts with more impartiality than was possible under the immediate stress of passion.

Another use is that evil acts show man what he is as nothing else could. Intentions, in themselves, seem harmless things; whereas, in fact, all evils have their source in them, or rather, in the affections which generate them. When they are carried out into act and we see their consequences, we become to some extent aware of their true nature. The permission of evil is a means of enlightening man as to his own spiritual state. If evil acts were not permitted, the chief agency by which men are awakened to a consciousness of sin would be destroyed. This revelation

to the mind of its own true nature is the indispensable condition of the commencement of that inward struggle against the domination of selfish desires on which salvation depends. If a man does not know his own evils he cannot fight against them; if he does not fight against them he cannot overcome them; if he does not overcome them, that is, if his affectional relation to them does not become one of aversion instead of favour, he cannot enter heaven. We can see, therefore, how simply true is Swedenborg's apparently paradoxical statement: "*Evils are permitted for a certain end, which is salvation.*"

It should be noted that this does not involve the assumption that *all* evils that are latent in a man's hereditary nature are permitted to come into act. Far from it. In every man innumerable tendencies exist which never come into his consciousness as active and recognised evils at all. The mode in which innate tendencies to evil are kept quiescent—or, if not quiescent, comparatively harmless—is threefold:

1. They may be wholly suppressed, so as never to exhibit themselves in consciousness at all. This is always the case in early childhood; but also, more or less, throughout life with every one.
2. They may be active, but not at all known as evils; in which case there is no responsibility, and comparatively little detriment to man's spiritual state. It is deliberate indulgence in known evils that is deeply injurious, and without repentance will be fatal.
3. They may be cherished in intention but prevented from coming into act by social influences,

fear of the law or of the loss of reputation, and other worldly motives. This restraint is doubtless beneficial; but it does not tend to extirpate the affections from which the intentions spring, since, but for such self-regarding motives, the man would give them free play, and does give them free play in his secret thought.

The permission of evil for the sake of salvation only involves the necessity that *some* evils should be allowed to express themselves in act, in order that a man may be able to know and shun them as evils. A man's spiritual state is determined chiefly by the relation of his will and understanding to the tendencies in himself which he himself recognises, or has at one time recognised, as wrong.

If this be true, the permission of spiritual evil and of acts which flow from it ceases to be an enigma. It is seen to be an inevitable consequence of the part which it is possible for Divine love and wisdom to take in the spiritual creation of man.

Similar considerations may enable us to understand the necessity of permitting the activity of the impulses towards wrong out of which evil intentions come. Man thinks that his impulses, both good and evil, are self-generated; but he is mistaken. They all come to him out of the spiritual world, and from spiritual beings there who are in affections corresponding to those which he himself experiences. Little as he thinks it, he is a centre in which innumerable streams of spiritual influence converge. The associations with spiritual beings, by means of which these influences reach him, vary from moment to moment; they are, indeed, the chief sphere of action of the Divine Pro-

vidence, which thus provides the conditions necessary to the existence of human freedom. Impulses towards evil are permitted to act upon him because the natural mind, in its native or hereditary state, has all its organic forms disordered, so that it is incapable of receiving the influx of good without perversion. Man is unaware of this organic degradation; but it operates nevertheless, and would continue to operate unless the organic forms of the mind were renovated and made capable of healthy action. The impulses towards evil which he receives from the spiritual world show him what is wrong in him, so far as he needs to know it for the purpose of the work he has to do.

We may, I think, now assume it to be proved that the permission of evil impulses, intentions, and acts is a relative *good,* so far as it conduces to self-knowledge and repentance. But this does not cover the whole ground. Two difficulties present themselves, which we must briefly notice.

It may be objected that though the permission of evil for the reasons stated above might be consonant with perfect justice if the consequences were confined to the person whose spiritual states were affected by such means, it is in reality far otherwise. How often do we find that the bad conduct of one person stimulates bad passions in others, which might never have come into existence but for such malign influence. One vicious boy may corrupt a whole school, and every bad man is a centre of noxious influences on others. There is, however, no greater difficulty involved in this fact than is involved in the stimulation of evil tendencies by influences emanating from the spiritual world. The bad passions were there, latent in their perverted, organic forms, in this case as in the other.

To have them disclosed and so recognised is a good. We are unable in the vast majority of cases to see the use which the disclosure serves; but we may still feel confident that the reason for the permission is valid, could we but see its final results.

Here we encounter the most formidable difficulty of all. The explanation, it may be said, might be accepted as sufficient if we were allowed to believe or even to hope that "good will be the final goal of ill." But if we accept Swedenborg's teaching this hope must be relinquished; for he asserts distinctly and emphatically that there are many in whom evil intentions and actions are not the means of amendment, but, on the contrary, produce such a total corruption of the spiritual nature that conscience is destroyed. They become incapable of willing good, and consequently of dwelling in heaven, and cannot but remain in hell to eternity. Can this permission, too, be described as even a relative good?

The answer to this question is to be found in the statement of Swedenborg, that if a man will not suffer himself to be prepared for and led to heaven, he must be prepared for and led to his place in hell. It sounds shocking. It did to me when I first read it. But look at the statement calmly and without prejudice. What is the alternative? That a bad man should be *abandoned* by infinite Love and Wisdom, left to plunge without any restraining influences or guidance into the most horrible evils? This is impossible. God cannot abandon any one. He cares as much for the wicked as the good. But the nature of the care which He can bestow upon any man, whether he be angel or devil, is necessarily conditioned by his state. He cannot raise into heaven one whose loves bind him to hell. But all evil

loves are not of equal enormity, and therefore there are hells which, as compared with each other, are more and less pernicious, just as there are heavens which are more and less heavenly. Is it not a good that a man should be restrained from plunging into the most frightful evils, and be led, as it were, to a milder rather than to a more malignant hell?

We cannot form any rational judgment on this subject unless these facts are firmly fixed in our minds:

1. Hell consists solely of those in whom conscience has been destroyed by a life of evil. They can act only from self-regarding motives.
2. Hell is itself a good in the estimation of those who are there, because it is their own love of evil that constitutes it, and what a man loves he calls good.
3. Hell is capable of continuous amelioration on the plane of that self-life which alone its inhabitants are capable of receiving. The confirmed love of evil in the will, approved by the understanding, brings a man, as Swedenborg sometimes says, under the operation of "the laws of truth separate from good." That is, Divine law is imposed upon him, with all the benefits a merely external order can bring, but without the love that makes it freedom and delight.
4. The inhabitants of hell are made to be of use to their associates and to men on earth. From them come those impulses to wrong which disclose to man something of his own spiritual state, and thus initiate in those who are willing to be led to heaven that struggle against themselves without which there is no salvation

possible. Thus evil itself is made a means of good to others, but not to the evil themselves, for they do not intend good, but evil.

Great as is the light which the writings of Swedenborg throw upon the nature of the spiritual world and of man as a part of it, influenced by and influencing the whole, they necessarily leave much in obscurity. We do not know, for instance, what proportion the inhabitants of hell from our earth bear to the inhabitants of heaven from our earth. We only know that the former are many. As to what may be the proportion of all the hells to all the heavens throughout the universe we have no means of forming any opinion. It may be infinitesimal.

We cannot *deny* that hell is eternal without denying that there are any conditions modifying and limiting Divine action on man, and thus plunging ourselves into inextricable confusion of thought. Why, then, should we perplex ourselves with the question? If we know that God never ceases to care for any of His creatures, that there is no useless and endless suffering in hell, that all punishment there is in some degree remedial, we shall know that if it be possible for infinite Love and Wisdom to bring about a change in the essential spiritual state of those who are in hell, that change will certainly be accomplished. But to assert that hell *cannot* be eternal; that all, even the most wicked, *must* ultimately be brought into heaven, is virtually to assert that evil is one of God's ways of producing good, than which there is no falsity more pernicious.

CHAPTER XX

THE USES OF PAIN

THE bodily and mental sufferings which all men have to endure, some more and some less, during their life on earth, evidently constitute a problem because of an element which they all have in common, namely, pain. No one who believes in God can have failed to ask himself, sometimes with deep perplexity, what can be the explanation of the appalling mass of suffering that exists in the world? The problem does not present itself to the merely worldly man, who regards pain in all forms as the result of chance, or of natural laws the operation of which cannot be altogether foreseen. The believer in God has to face a problem which for the theoretical or practical atheist does not exist. It is his belief that occasions his perplexity; for he finds it difficult, or perhaps impossible, to reconcile the conception that the universe is governed by a Being of infinite goodness, wisdom, and power, with the apparently purposeless suffering which he sees around him. He may see clearly that a large part—probably by far the greater part—of it is the direct or indirect result of human evil, and also that it is one of the chief means by which men are awakened to some perception of the true nature of evil; but, at the same time, he cannot disguise from himself the fact that a huge mass of suffering exists which seems to be quite useless and even mischievous. It seems to make people querulous, selfish, hard-hearted, and sometimes openly irreligious.

It is evident that Swedenborg's teaching forces this problem on our attention in the most intense and importunate form. One who fully accepts it can no longer regard any accident as really accidental, as the majority even of religious people, I think, virtually do. In the Divine sphere of action there are no accidents. Everything is ordained or controlled for the best, in view of all the spiritual conditions of the case. We have, therefore, to put the question to ourselves in this form, "Is there a purpose in *all* the pain that exists in the world? Does it *always* accomplish *something* in the preparation of man for his eternal destiny?" We cannot be satisfied with any reply but an unreserved affirmative.

It is clear that the same limitations which preclude us from seeing the use of the permission of spiritual evil in particular cases must also preclude us from discovering the uses of pain in individual cases. The explanation which will remove the difficulties which stand in the way of an affirmative reply to the above questions will consist of a demonstration of the uses of pain in general; and the validity of the explanation will depend on the firmness with which we grasp certain fundamental truths:

1. The use of man's life on earth is to determine by his own choice of good or evil his spiritual state to eternity.
2. The Divine Providence acts solely with regard to man's eternal welfare.
3. If a man cannot be prepared and fitted for life in heaven, he must be prepared and fitted for his life in hell.
4. Anything which helps to lead a good man to a higher good than he would otherwise attain, or

prevents a bad man from plunging into deeper evils, or develops in either of them any power which may be conducive to his own welfare or that of others in the life hereafter, is a *good*, the value of which must infinitely outweigh any temporary suffering.

If these propositions be denied or doubted, to that extent the proposed explanation will necessarily fail to convince.

To approach this subject first in the most general way, if we ask ourselves the question, "Would we, if we could, choose to live in a world totally devoid of pain?" I doubt whether any one who has thought at all seriously about life could answer, yes. Such a world would necessarily be without law, either human or Divine, or, at least, with none that exacted any penalty for its infringement. Ignorance and excess would entail no manifestly bad consequences. The elementary conditions which form man into an intelligent being would be absent. Self-restraint would want its most immediate and powerful incentive, and consequently would never come into existence. Pity would not exist, for there would be no obvious occasion for the feeling; and if there were it could not be felt, for there is in it a strong element of pain. Habits of industry would not be formed, for idleness would entail no penalty. I think we can see clearly that a world in which there was no pain would be in a far more pitiable condition than the world in which we live, full of suffering as it is. It would, indeed, be a far less happy world. The atmosphere of sympathy and love by which we are all more or less encompassed even when we are not suffering, and which adds so greatly to our happiness, would not exist. There would be nothing

to generate it; for it is chiefly the offspring of pain felt and witnessed. If we had not ourselves endured pain we could not commiserate it in others, for we could not imagine what it was like. If we were deprived of the discipline of pain we should have no regard for the feelings of our fellow-men, because they would have none that could be hurt. Who cannot see that under such conditions only an utterly unhuman race could exist?

Having reached this point, it will not be difficult to perceive some at least of the particular uses of pain. The value of pain as a deterrent is universally admitted, and we need not dwell upon it. Let us pass to some uses of pain that are not so commonly recognised.

1. Pain is an Element in Pleasure

Strange as it sounds, pain seems to be an indispensable ingredient in many of our pleasures, both higher and lower—perhaps in all that are of an intense kind. To take the lower first. The privation of pleasure is a pain, but how greatly it adds to our enjoyments! If we never felt hunger should we enjoy our dinners? Fear has an element of pain, and yet it is the salt which gives zest to all our sports. If we did not fear to lose, we should not care to win. Whoever examines the pictures which sometimes appear in our illustrated papers of runners at the end of a hard race, will see that they were at a point of exhaustion which in itself must have been most painful. Would they enjoy the race as much if they ran without exertion so strenuous as to bring them to the very verge of collapse? The illustrations might be multiplied, but it is needless.

Passing to the higher pleasures, in all reverence there is an element of fear. In fact, in all high and worthy love there is that element. We cannot love any one in

the highest sense unless we respect him ; and we respect him because we feel he has a standard by which he will judge us, and we fear lest we should fail to stand the test. It is not, therefore, altogether true to say that " perfect love casteth out fear." Slavish, ignoble fear, it does, but not that nobler kind which is reverence and awe. To carry the analysis to the highest sphere, in all humiliation before God, in all sense of unworthiness in His sight, there is an element of pain. But who that has experienced such states would choose to be without them ?

There is a pertinent criticism which may be made on all this. " Pain," it may be urged, " is what we feel. Pain that becomes pleasure is no longer pain." True. But though pain is so transformed in the wondrous alchemy of human emotion, it nevertheless retains its identity—just as the elements, hydrogen and oxygen, retain their identity when combined in their compound, water, which is so utterly unlike either. The point is that our spiritual as well as our natural pleasures could not possess the intensity they do without an element which but for the transformation it undergoes in the process of combination would be pain. Destroy the element and you necessarily destroy the compound.

2. Pain instructs

Pain is evidently the first experience which teaches a child that he is living in a world of fixed laws which cannot be trifled with. The laws of nature operate unfailingly, and cannot be disregarded with impunity. What would be the use of a world of order if there were nothing in the constitution of that world to enforce the necessity of learning and obeying its laws ?

At first a child has no idea of pain beyond that which is physical. As he advances in years he enters into a

new sphere of pleasure and pain. He begins to perceive that the approbation and disapprobation of those he loves can cause pleasure and pain of a different kind. His conscience, in its first rudimentary form, is little more than this. The child-conscience, though immature and imperfect, is of inestimable value in education; for it is the principal agent in the formation of good habits, which may carry the youth unharmed through that dangerous period when on entering adult life he finds himself his own master, and when his religious principles, if he has any, are little more than the reflection of what he has been taught by others, and are not yet worked into the structure of his own mind.

As he advances into adult life and acquires the ability to judge and decide for himself concerning matters both natural and spiritual in which he has hitherto been content to accept with more or less docility the guidance of his parents and teachers, he becomes sensible of a still higher range of pleasure and pain. There opens up before him the conception of joy in God, and in obedience to His will, which, while not excluding any lower joys, consecrates and purifies them all. This higher perception is also enforced by pain when his conscience tells him that he has been faithless to that nobler end of existence which has, however dimly, begun to open before him. Thus pain accompanies him throughout, as a wise and stern monitress, reminding him continually: "This is the way; walk thou in it."

Pain, moreover, instructs us as to our own spiritual state. We think we trust in God, and so perhaps we do, to some extent, but not so much as we think. Pain comes, assailing us, perhaps, at the tenderest and

most vulnerable point of our nature, and our faith fails. We become irritable, discontented, and perhaps in our hearts rebel against God for letting such a misfortune befall us. We cannot yet say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Is pain the cause of this collapse of our faith? No, it is only the touch-stone that shows us how much more shallow our faith was than we imagined, and that we must seek one more vital and enduring. Without the self-revelation brought by pain we should never have known how feeble our faith was.

3. Pain develops Endurance

When a little child suffers it can at first do nothing but cry out; but the germs of self-control soon begin to show themselves, and are encouraged and fostered by wise parents. Crying is often a relief, and should not be too strictly repressed. But a point comes when self-abandonment to suffering becomes, not a relief, but an added pain. The child suffers less when resolution comes to its aid and it tries to suffer in silence. This self-control in children who have suffered much sometimes reaches the level of truly heroic endurance. Now the natural endurance which is thus engendered is intended to be, like every other good natural quality, the foundation of a spiritual quality corresponding to it, but of incomparably higher value. Success in the spiritual life, as in the natural, depends far more on endurance than on any other quality. It is written, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Without its basis in the natural mind, the spiritual quality could not be developed.

In later life, though pain of itself effects no change in the essential spiritual life of man, it may be means of initiating such a change. Swedenborg teaches that

no one is reformed in states of affliction, suffering, or the fear of death, because at such times the mind is not in full possession of its freedom and rationality. Yet such states often lead to a real reformation, which, but for their aid, could not have been brought about. When we are suffering from severe illness, pain, or bereavement, or from the loss of worldly prosperity, a lull often comes in the eagerness of our worldly desires. In the darkened chamber where one we have loved lies dead, or when death seems not far off from ourselves, and when our ambitions have been shattered, things present themselves in a different light from what they did when we were floating on the full tide of health and prosperity. The world for a moment falls away from us. We see things in something like their true proportion and perspective, and feel the worthlessness of many of the aims we have been pursuing with so much eagerness. This, however, is not reformation, though the person who undergoes such a revulsion of feeling often imagines that it is. It is an introduction to reform which will become effective and actual only if on restoration to health, or when the sense of loss has been blunted by time, he perseveres in a new path. This is not always the case. The states of penitence often vanish with returning health, and the old states return. Yet these states though evanescent have been experienced ; a check has been given, though only momentarily, to the dominion of self-love ; and doubtless some beneficial effect always remains which may be utilised by the Divine Providence in the life hereafter.

It may, therefore, I think, be confidently stated that there is nothing in the wide-spread human suffering we witness irreconcilable with the existence of a Divine

Providence which overrules all for good. Any enlightenment beyond this is in the nature of things impossible. We must be content with the assurance that human suffering sets no obstacle in the way of belief in a Divine Providence which controls all things for good.

We may now be able to see why it is that the Divine Providence is so deeply hidden behind the series of apparently natural events. For it consists in a perpetual assault on man's natural self-love, not merely with a view to suppressing its manifestation in thought and act, but to its utter eradication, and its replacement by a ruling affection of a totally contrary character. If man clearly perceived the aims and methods of Divine Providence, how deeply would he resent them! It would seem to him as if it were seeking to deprive him of everything he held most dear. There is no ground for any quarrel but an assault on some love, and this ground of quarrel would exist between man and God if man knew from the first what God was aiming at in his regard. He is, therefore, kept in ignorance of what is going on in himself, unless, perhaps, when the change has been to some extent accomplished, and he looks back with opened eyes on the events that seemed inexplicable when they happened.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LIFE OF RELIGION

PERHAPS the most frequently quoted sentence from Swedenborg's writings is that in which he says, "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good." What has been said incidentally about life in former chapters will, I hope, have prepared the reader to interpret this aphorism correctly; but for the sake of clearness we will recapitulate. All life is in its origin Divine and uncreatable. It flows into and thus animates all living things, but is received by each according to its own inherent and acquired nature, and therefore exhibits, in its manifestations, both in the natural and spiritual worlds, phenomena characteristic of the class to which the recipient form belongs, with a difference in each individual due to the fact that as an individuality, it is not exactly like any other comprised in the class. The peculiarity and dignity of human life, that which distinguishes man from all other created beings, and renders him capable of entering heaven, is that he can recognise this inflowing life as Divine, and voluntarily place himself in harmony with it.

It follows from this general conception of life, that there must be in the mind of man vessels adapted to receive the Divine life, and channels by which it may be distributed to every faculty which he possesses. Only when his whole being, from its inmost recesses where the Divine life has its first access to his nature,

down to the very faculties by which he governs the actions of his body, is formed into some likeness to the Divine, can the Divine life flow into him without being perverted and distorted — not, of course, in itself, but in its manifestation through him. As God is infinite love and wisdom, there must be spiritual organs in man by which these two essentials of the Divine nature can be received in a finite degree. These organs and receptacles are the will and the understanding, the one formed to receive the life of love and the other to receive the life of wisdom. But as these two in the Divine nature itself are, as Swedenborg phrases it, "distinctly one"—forming a perfect unity, *without* losing their distinctness—so in man the will and the intellect must form a one; the affections of the will must be united to appropriate truths in the understanding; these truths being the only means by which the willing of good can be directed to truly beneficent action. This indissoluble union of the loves of the will, with perceptions of truth in the understanding, is called by Swedenborg the "heavenly marriage"; and is the essential fact in the regeneration of man. The whole aim of the life of man upon earth is to bring about this heavenly marriage; or, if that be from any circumstances impossible during life upon earth, at least to lay the foundation in the will to which the necessary truths may be united in the other life. In the degree that a man's affections are firmly established in the love of good or use, and this love is enlightened by abundant truths, is the value of the services which he is able to render to others and therefore to the Lord, and, consequently, the higher and more interior the heaven to which he can attain, and the greater the delight which his service there yields him.

"Life," in the sentence quoted above, does not denote external conduct merely, but the whole conscious existence of man; "doing good" does not mean the mere performance of benevolent actions, but having a regard to use or good in everything a man does. Religion, therefore, is not intended to regulate one department of human life only, but the whole.

This "life of religion," as it is exhibited in its final development and relative perfection in heaven, is infinitely various; for no angel there exhibits it in exactly the same form as another. Yet the principal qualities which constitute the heavenly life may be enumerated.

1. A man must think of God as a Divinely Human Being, possessing infinite love and wisdom.
2. His affections must be set on doing good for its own sake, without any view to reward.
3. His mind must be furnished with truths corresponding to the good of his affections and adequate to the uses in which he is to be engaged.
4. He must be imbued with innocence.
5. He must be divested of the idea that any merit belongs to him on account of the truths he possesses or the good he does.

The first qualification is essential because the thought of God prevails universally in the human mind, so far as religion exercises any real sway over it. It is the source from which all lower and subordinate truths are derived. Anything false in a man's thoughts about God will inevitably find its way into and pervert all the subordinate beliefs which constitute his creed. It is impossible to think truly of God except as a Divine Man. If a

man finally, when the process of judgment has freed him from all outside obstructions, limitations, and misconceptions, and exhibited him in his essential self, cannot think of God in this manner, he cannot think of Him at all, and therefore cannot be in heaven. For the presence of God constitutes heaven, and He is present in the affections and thoughts of the angels, and could not be in their affections unless He were in their thoughts.

The second qualification is essential because heaven is a happy state, and it is impossible to make any one happy except in the free exercise of his affections. The two things are, in fact, identical. Happiness, as conceived and experienced by every one, is the unrestrained indulgence of the affections ; and such as the affections are, such is the delight experienced. If a man's affections are set on doing good he can be made eternally happy in doing it.

The third qualification is essential because truth alone can teach how real good is to be done. Love of itself is blind. Truths give it eyes and enable it to act wisely. Faith or truth is, indeed, nothing but love seeking out the means by which it may express itself in action.

Innocence, in Swedenborg's use of the word, does not imply ignorance of evil, nor lack of capacity for dealing firmly and effectively with complicated or adverse conditions, but simply a heartfelt desire to be led by the Lord in every affection, thought, and deed. The innocence of children is due to ignorance and immaturity, and is, therefore, quite different from the innocence of wisdom which the angels possess. Yet the innocence of children presents a picture of genuine innocence in its freedom from care, its light-hearted contentment, and its unquestioning reliance on the guidance of parents and teachers.

The last qualification is a derivation from the others. To know God is to recognise Him as the source of all true humanity in finite beings. A man's heart, when he knows God after this manner, is the love of receiving all his affections from Him. All the truths he knows are His truths, according to which he delights to live. So long as a man retains any self-satisfaction in the consciousness of his own goodness or wisdom, he is not yet imbued with the pure love of goodness and truth for their own sake, nor is he wholly willing to be led by the Lord. He thinks that he leads himself and does it well; and the self-congratulation of conscious merit is, in some degree at least, his reward. This does not differ in nature from that "doing good to be seen of men" which the Lord condemned; and He indicated the need for the total eradication of this principle of conduct when He said, "When ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke xvii. 10).

When once a man feels and loves to feel that all the virtues he possesses are not his own but the Lord's in him, merit dies. Anything like praise, Swedenborg says, is repugnant to the angels. They regard those who attribute merit to themselves on account of the good actions they do as thieves, because they claim for themselves that which belongs to the Lord alone.

The life of religion as it exists in heaven is nothing but healthy, orderly, active, useful human life, based on a heartfelt recognition of the fundamental facts of the spiritual universe, that "there is none good but the one God," and that "a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Religion, therefore, is not for this life only but for the eternal life as well, and its

principles are the same in each; but here the life of religion is in the making; there it is in its fruition and eternally progressive development.

The problem we have now to consider is how man can contribute to the development in himself of those qualities which constitute the essential life of heaven. Evidently he cannot by any action of his own directly affect the life which flows into him, for this is uncreate and uncreatable. Nor is any action by him on this life in the least necessary; for since it is essentially Divine Love united with Divine Wisdom, boundless in its scope; because it is impersonal, including all persons, it can never fail to influence any human mind from which it is not shut out by one or both of two conditions—an unwillingness in the mind itself to receive that life in its purity because its affections are set on self in some form; or an obsession of the mind by falsities, which, so far as they prevail, must divert even the genuine love of good into erroneous channels. For truth or faith is not merely the verbal expression of what a man believes, nor even the belief itself, but the very interior organisation of the affections according to truth; so that the affections naturally and spontaneously run in the channels laid down by Divine truth. Truth, Swedenborg often says, is merely "the form of good"—an expression which some people find difficult to understand. But it is not really difficult; and it is of importance that we should understand it; for unless we do, the doctrine of life contained in Swedenborg's works will be in a great measure unintelligible. Let us, then, pause a moment to illustrate this statement.

Suppose a pupil goes to his teacher with some mathematical or other problem which perplexes him. The

teacher explains and solves the difficulty. The pupil exclaims, "I see," and not only does he see, or understand, at the moment, but whenever the problem recurs, if he has a good memory, the explanation recurs also, and the problem occasions him no difficulty. He has, in fact, acquired a new natural truth, available for service whenever it is wanted. Where does that truth reside? In the vibrations of air by which the teacher communicated it to the pupil's ear, and so to his mind? Not so: for these have been dissipated and the truth remains. Where does it remain? In the pupil's mind, evidently. But how does it remain? The pupil's mind is the same that it was before; but something has happened to it which has permanently altered its constitution. This can only be conceived as a modification of its organisation or form. It matters not for the purpose of the illustration whether you consider the material brain as constituting the mind, or as a physical organ through which the mind acts. Some organic change must have taken place in it, in order that the explanation which has been given to the pupil may be permanently available. And the result of the modification is that whenever the affections under the influence of which the pupil may be, require the service of this natural fact or truth, it is there, ready for use. Precisely similar is the relation of spiritual good and truth in the mind. Real faith is simply the construction of the forms of the mind according to Divine truth, in such fashion that whenever an affection of good or the desire to perform a spiritual use arises in that mind, there is always at hand the appropriate truth to enable the desire to be carried into effect.

The kind of life which a man or angel exhibits depends on the following factors. First, the inflowing Divine life which in itself is always and everywhere the same,

but, as it reaches the consciousness of any individual, has been modified and accommodated to his powers of reception, partly by passage through the interior degrees of his own mind, and partly by its transmission to him indirectly through other beings who have likewise unconsciously modified it in its passage through their own minds.

Secondly, the spiritual organisation of his own natural mind; for this determines the thoughts which, to all appearance, spontaneously arise in his mind. The influx of life into his mind, as we have seen, he cannot influence. Can he influence the other condition? Not in the least. It is totally beyond his power to affect the organisation of his mind in the slightest degree. What then can he do? Perhaps an illustration drawn from natural life may help us to the answer.

When a student of the violin first tries to play, he makes the mistakes that all beginners do. He plays out of tune; he plays wrong notes; and produces the prodigies of dissonance which that wonderful instrument is capable of emitting in the hands of an unskilful performer. If he perseveres in his efforts, and especially if he has the advantage of natural ability and good tuition, these defects gradually disappear. His tone becomes full and rich, and his muscles, instead of going blunderingly about their duties, become like a bevy of well-trained servants, ready on the slightest indication to carry out their master's wishes. If he has great talent a time may come when the difficulties of *technique* have been entirely overcome, and he can concentrate his whole attention on the interpretation of the composition he is performing. What is the secret of the improvement in his execution which has taken place since he made his first attempts? His whole physical being—

brain, nerves, and muscles—has been organised, drilled, disciplined on the lines of "how to do it." In other words, the truths appropriate to that particular kind of action have been embodied in him. He had not the slightest power to effect the organisation or reorganisation on which the result depends. This has been accomplished by some power outside his own volition and intellect, while he was totally absorbed in his work, and thinking of nothing less than any organic change in himself. But though, if the point were put to him, he must confess that this is so, he knows very well that he has done *something* without which the result would not have been achieved. What was that? Well, he simply tried to do his best. And what was his best? To carry out in practice the instructions he received from his teacher. If he had merely *listened* to those instructions; merely *assented* to them as unquestionably indicating the correct way to play the violin, he would not have progressed a single step. On his part it has been throughout a case of trying to *do* what he was *taught*. Without this, the incorporation of the instructions in his own mental and physical nature would never have taken place. But without that work of interior organisation all his trying would have been fruitless. He would have remained to the end the bungler he was at the beginning. So it is with the life of religion. It is of no use to think about truth, to assent to it, to admire it, unless we try to practise it. And every truth can be practised or lived, even that which seems, at first sight, most abstract and philosophical; for every truth has relation to some department of the life of man, his affections, his thoughts, or his actions.

No teacher has been so specific and detailed as Swedenborg in his theological and religious doctrine.

He believed that no mystery was so profound as not to be within the comprehension of the human mind in a measure adequate to its needs, and that therefore it could be expressed in clear language. It is impressive to find this man of truth, of definite, uncompromising doctrine, constantly insisting on the utter worthlessness of truth or faith *alone*. The only use of truth is as a guide to life; and unless we put the truths we know to this use we do not really possess them. In the other life, where all things are reduced to their essential reality, they will be seen to be things we only "seemed to have."

CHAPTER XXII

REGENERATION

THE qualities which were described in the last chapter as constituting the essential life of religion are evidently not such as any one possesses by nature, or even desires to possess. They are, on the contrary, opposed to our spontaneous, natural inclinations. It is true that every child and every simple-minded man, indeed, every one who thinks at all about God, thinks of Him anthropomorphically; that is, he attributes to Him qualities like those he knows in himself and in his fellow-creatures, but in transcendent perfection. But how inconstant and feeble is this idea when it first enters his mind! How far from that abiding *sense* of the Divine presence, which illuminates the minds of the angels and is the Sun of their world! The idea of God, when first acquired, is stored up in the memory along with the other knowledges deposited there, and is only called forth when the thoughts which happen to occupy the mind require its production. Usually during the early years of life, and often for long afterwards, it exercises little or no control over a man's intentions, thoughts and conduct; still less does it constitute the governing power of his whole being.

Every one feels pleasure in doing good to those he loves; nor does he usually find it very hard to do it for the sake of the applause of others, or the gratification of his own self-esteem, or to secure some benefit for himself in this world or the next. But he finds

no pleasure in doing good apart from such motives as these, all of which have a direct or covert relation to self-love.

The love of knowledge is deeply implanted in human nature. The kind of knowledge which a man acquires with pleasure is determined by his aims and tastes. It is quite possible to have a natural or acquired taste for religious observances, and even for religious truth, which is nevertheless essentially worldly; but it is not natural to man to make the truths he knows the rule of his daily life. On the contrary, the natural tendency of the mind is to be satisfied with believing truth, and to neglect the practice of it.

Innocence, as Swedenborg defines the term, is not attractive to man in his unregenerate state. He likes to lead himself, and has no desire whatever to be led every moment by the Lord, nor even any conception that such leading is possible. He values the virtues he possesses because he deems them his own. The idea that he ought to be divested of all self-satisfaction in his own goodness, if presented to his mind, would seem to him to strike at the very root of his virtues. The notion that true happiness consists in being led by God in all his affections, thoughts, and actions, would seem to reduce him to the level of an automaton.

Plainly, therefore, if these qualities constitute heaven, and if heaven must be in a man in order that he may be in heaven, the life of religion involves a complete revolution in the mind, as to its conceptions of what constitutes well-being. A man who possesses a good disposition derived from heredity and favouring circumstances needs it as much as one whose hereditary tendencies are bad, and have been further depraved by bad example and precept; because, so far as his

spiritual state is merely the result of heredity and circumstance, it is based on self-love just as much as that of the other; and in all its forms self-love, as a dominating motive, is opposed to the love of God and the neighbour which constitutes the essential life of religion.

If we firmly grasp the fact that a radical change must take place in a man's spiritual nature in order that the life of true religion may be manifested in him, certain important corollaries will be easily seen.

The process must be a gradual one. No one can pass in a day or a year from a state almost completely dominated by self-love to one almost completely emancipated from its influence as a ruling motive. If the change could be effected suddenly it would amount to the destruction of one being and the creation of another. There would be no continuity in the process, and identity would be lost. The actual change is as imperceptible as that by which the constituents of the physical body are removed and replaced. Even when it seems sudden, it is the result of processes of mental metamorphosis which have been going on from childhood. Conversion is, indeed, a fact of transcendent importance. It means that a man has more or less consciously and deliberately *turned round*, and instead of pursuing the path of self-satisfaction has begun to make for another goal. If this turning round, or change of mind, does not take place, there will be no regeneration for him; but it is not in itself regeneration, though it leads to it, if the new direction which is thus given to his central aims be steadily followed to the end of life.

As man must throughout the process of regeneration be a co-worker with God, and he can only work with the powers he actually possesses, he must be influenced,

at any given moment, by such motives as can affect him in his existing state. The absolute best will not always, nor generally, be the relative best, or the best for him. The higher motives would be ineffective in the earlier stages of his spiritual journey. Only motives cognate with his own imperfect state will work. The last thing to be extirpated from a mind that is undergoing the process of regeneration is the sense of self-merit; yet, this is the first worker in the cause. If it were forcibly and prematurely suppressed it would leave the mind inert. How true this is we may see from the case of children, with whom the love of approbation is one of the most powerful influences for good they can feel; but if this love be unduly prolonged as a ruling motive it becomes an abuse. It should be gradually superseded, as the child advances towards adult life, by regard for duty. Yet this sense of duty will, at first, inevitably be in a large measure self-centred. Similar substitutions of purer for less pure motives should take place with us all from time to time; for we are all older children, learning our lessons throughout our lives, and we must not want to close our books till the lessons are learnt. Everything we attain should be a step to further attainment.

If the total transformation which regeneration involves were distinctly perceived by a man when he takes his first faltering steps heavenwards; that is, if all the evil affections latent in his nature, and which have to be removed, were disclosed to him then, he would be overwhelmed by the apparent impossibility of the task he was called upon to undertake. The Divine Providence, therefore, mercifully conceals from him all those evils in himself which he does not need to know in order that he may be able to perform the

work which it is his immediate duty to undertake. The life of religion usually dawns in a man's mind by his resolving to overcome some one tendency in himself which he sees to be wrong. He has probably imagined that if he really bent his mind to overcome it he would succeed without much difficulty. But when he actually essays the task he finds that he has altogether miscalculated the power of the adversary he has to subdue; that the struggle which he hoped would be short, if sharp, is one for life or death, renews itself in ever varying forms, and seems as if it would never end. He learns a little of that most distressing and yet most salutary lesson—his own weakness and inability to withstand temptation by any strength of his own.

By this time his horizon has enlarged. His attention is no longer concentrated upon deliverance from one fault only. He now sees many in himself the existence of which he did not at first suspect. And so he goes on through life, if he is faithful to the new monitions of conscience which will come to him from time to time. As the films of self-love are removed from his mental eyes, he learns to know himself better, and to detect infirmities which were invisible to him at the commencement of his spiritual journey. Consequently, as a man advances in the regenerate life, he does not come, as doubtless he once hoped to do, into a fuller consciousness of freedom from sin, but into a deeper consciousness of his own evils. The very qualities which he formerly regarded as his virtues become his sins; not necessarily because the acts they suggested were wrong—these may have been right enough—but because of the spirit in which he did them, and claimed them as his own.

By such means as these does the Divine Providence lead every man who is willing to be led, in the path of regeneration. The invisibility of the final goal, the devious and unknown paths by which it has to be reached, and the limited outlook of the wayfarer, who sees little beyond the difficulties by which he is immediately confronted, throw into strong relief the impotence of man to bring about his own regeneration. Yet there is something he must do; something without which the process will never be accomplished. What is this indispensable condition which man must contribute to his preparation for heaven, and consequently, to his own salvation?

The life of religion is active and positive; but this life, when it is truly heavenly, is not man's own, and is not regarded by him as his own, but as the Lord's in him; he knows that it is "given him from heaven." The obstacle to his reception of that life is in the disordered and perverted affections which animate him, and which must be extirpated, and replaced by affections of an opposite kind. In order that this purely Divine work may be accomplished it is necessary that a man should shun the evils to which he is prone as sins against God. After he has done this, and not before, he will be able to do good that is truly good, because it is from God and not from himself.

The life of religion is not developed in man by shunning evils from any other motive than this. The most worldly men may and do shun many evils because they see that indulgence in them would be injurious to their interests. This does not tend to eradicate the loves from which the impulses to evil come, but only suppresses their manifestation; for when a man abstains from wrong-doing from merely self-regarding motives,

he still cherishes the evil loves in his heart, and would practise them did he not foresee that he would lose more than he would gain by indulging them. The propensities themselves remain unsubdued. But when he begins to shun evils because they are sins, that is, to practise the truths of religion in his inner and essential self and not merely in his outward conduct, the foundation is laid on which the Divine Providence can build that new and heavenly nature which delights in goodness and truth for their own sakes, and which will gradually enable him to regard the evils he formerly delighted in as detestable and infernal.

Here we reach the simplest and most universal element of true religion, the thing which no man who deals honestly with himself can doubt to be essentially and certainly right, and the thing which, if he is faithful to his own perceptions of truth, however elementary these may be, will ultimately lead him not only to an ever expanding view of the relation of religion to life, but to the solution of all his doubts. No one who shuns his evils as sins can fail to be regenerated and thus saved, because in this way he will acquire a genuine conscience, instead of that *simulacrum*, compounded out of pride and regard for one's own reputation, which often passes current for it.

The simplest and most universal laws which ought to govern the life of a Christian are contained in the Ten Commandments, regarded as regulative of the thoughts and intentions as well as the outward acts, in the spirit and not merely in the letter, according to the Lord's own teaching (Matt. v. 28). It is because the shunning of evil must precede the doing of genuine good, that the Commandments relating more directly to outward conduct are in the prohibitive form. In

their merely literal import they do not differ greatly from the moral codes enforced by all religions. Their efficacy in developing the life of religion depends entirely on our shunning the evils they condemn as sins.

A genuine conscience is the sole qualification needed to enable a man to partake of the life of heaven. But conscience may be relatively rudimentary or developed; and no one ought to be satisfied with the attainment of a superficial apprehension and practice of Divine truth, while it is in his power to attain something more perfect. But he must necessarily begin at the beginning, with obedience to the Commandments in their simplest, literal sense, as a matter of religious obligation. On this will all his further enlightenment and progress depend.

In order that a man may advance in the religious life, he must examine not only his actions but his thoughts and intentions, for in these the origin of all evils is to be found. This self-examination must be practical and specific. It is easy to confess in general terms that one is guilty of all sorts of evil, and yet be unaware of the existence of any particular evil in one's self. Such lip-confession is of no avail. Our evils cannot be resisted in general; they must be fought one by one as they are seen and known.

It is never easy for a man to resist his own evils, whether they express themselves in acts visible to others, or lurk unseen in the recesses of his nature; for his evils come from his natural affections, and his affections are himself. Religion sets him at war with himself. He has to compel himself to obey the truth, contrary to his inclinations. The Lord cannot come to the mind at first with peace, but comes with a sword; but He comes with a sword in order that true and

lasting peace may come afterwards, when the disorderly affections which have usurped the rule have been subdued.

We need not go outside our daily life, in our business and our homes, to find the opportunity of shunning evils as sins against God. Religion has been too often regarded as something extraneous to this; as an important *addendum* to man's daily activities, and not as their very soul and life. Yet if we believe that our life on earth has no other end than to render us fit for heaven, we cannot think that the occupations in which we are necessarily engaged during the greater part of our time, have no relation to this end. On the contrary, a man's daily work and his life in his home are the essential sphere of his religion and of his real worship of God. All the accessories of religious life, public and private worship, prayer, the reading of the Word and the observances of a life of piety are of use just so far as they stimulate and maintain the habit of shunning of evils as sins against God in a man's daily occupations and duties.

If we accept this view of what essentially constitutes man's duty, certain errors which have obscured the subject will be easily dispelled.

Religion does not consist in constantly thinking about God and eternal life. We may think too much about things even of this high kind, and become so absorbed in meditation that we do nothing. When we are busy with our work, whatever it may be, we must think of our work, and of our work only, or we shall not do it well; and all work well done from conscientious motives is a religious act. It does not follow that the thought of God is absent because it is not present in consciousness. A man who loves his

wife and children works for them all day long, but he is not always thinking about them. This love is latent in his work, as its secret, inspiring motive. So it is with the thought of God while he is performing his daily duties. God may be "in all his thoughts" though he is not consciously thinking about Him. But this latent thought will become conscious in a moment, whenever he is tempted to do something which he knows the Divine law forbids.

The growth of religion in the soul is not fostered, but rather impeded, by a man secluding himself from the temptations and dangers of life in the world. The world we are to renounce cannot be given up in this wholesale way. We need indeed give up nothing except our way of regarding our life as our own, to do what we like with, and the things of the world as means of procuring happiness through self-indulgence. This tendency can be better fought and overcome in the wholesome activities of a busy life, than in seclusion, where, debarred from industry and sympathetic contact with our fellow-men, we are all the more likely to be dominated by the thought of self, which may be none the less selfish because it is occupied with our own destiny in the other world.

A man will not be helped to attain the life of true religion by brooding over his shortcomings and sins. The record of these has been written on his own nature, and there, and there alone, can their results be confronted and obliterated. The mere recalling them with melancholy and persistent self-reproach does not tend to destroy the power of evil over us. Very often it has the opposite effect, and the power of evil is riveted upon us by morbid introspection and self-condemnation. Self-examination is necessary in order that we

may know our own evils; but it should always be made with the practical object of enabling us to resist them when they recur.

Here, then, we have the true, vital, indispensable contribution of human free-will to the work of regeneration. Men might be easily compelled to obey the Divine laws by rewards and punishments, were it consonant with the aims of the Divine Providence to form a heaven of slaves and self-seekers; but they cannot be compelled to embrace the life of religion, for this is essentially free. When a man compels himself to obey a law which he sees to be right, but does not yet love sufficiently to be able to obey it spontaneously, then is he most free; because he is laying the foundation on which the Divine Providence can erect for him an eternal freedom through the truth which will thus become incorporated in his nature.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RELIGIOUS UNREST OF THE AGE

THE difficulties which exist in the present day in connection with a belief in Divine revelation are universally recognised, and are probably felt more or less acutely by every thoughtful man. By some they are welcomed, as promising at no distant date the extinction of an ancient superstition. To religious men they cause profound distress, for they are often compelled to confess that they can see no solution of them. They hold on to their religious faith with the despairing grasp of a drowning man.

One of the chief causes of this unrest is the fact that almost every kind of research in which scholars and scientific men have been engaged during the last hundred years has dealt a more or less severe blow to beliefs which were formerly regarded as indispensable elements in the Christian creed. Geology and palæontology, by demonstrating the immense antiquity of the earth and of its animal and vegetable inhabitants, have shattered the Biblical cosmogony and chronology which were generally accepted until recent times. Anatomy and embryology have shown how closely man is allied structurally with the lower animals, and suggested that he is only differentiated from them by his superior intelligence. Many thoughtful people feel that the theory of evolution has deprived of all cogency the argument from design which in the middle of the last century was the stronghold of teleology, and

has undermined the doctrine of special creations, if it has not rendered it untenable. The study of comparative religion and mythology has proved that some of the stories contained in the Bible, some of the conceptions found there, and not a few of its maxims which used to be regarded as the hall-marks of revealed religion, have their variants in the ancient literature of many races. Increased intercourse with nations outside the Christian world has led to a view of the so-called "heathen" religions quite incompatible with the "work-of-the-devil" theory which satisfied our orthodox forefathers. During the past fifty years the documents composing our Bible have been scrutinised with a freedom and thoroughness unknown before, and though few people feel themselves qualified to pass judgment on the work of the critics, certain results of their work have permeated the popular mind, or rather, perhaps, have called attention to facts which are patent when once they are fairly faced; as, for instance, that the Bible records are not always consistent with each other; that the authorship of most of them is unknown, and that some of the acts attributed to Jehovah in the Old Testament revolt the conscience.

It seems as if during the last hundred years or so a new faculty had been developed in the human mind, which we may call "the scientific conscience." It does not set itself to prove that to be true which has always been regarded as true in the past, but to ascertain by an unbiassed study of the facts, so far as they are attainable, what *is* true. It distrusts the affections as factors in the discovery or elucidation of truth. To find out what the facts are, and how they can be rationally accounted for, all prepossessions and predilections

being carefully excluded, is the sole object of its care. This dispassionate temper of inquiry has affected the habitual modes of thought of all educated men. They have begun to reflect about their traditional religious creeds with unprecedented freedom. The most orthodox of Christians attempt to justify their beliefs by reasons in a way that would have seemed to their orthodox forefathers to strike at the very roots of religious faith. Scarcely anywhere outside the Roman Catholic communion do we hear the admonition that we ought to believe, without question or examination, what the Church teaches, or even what the Bible teaches. The age of blind belief seems to be passing away without the possibility of arrest or recall, and to be replaced by a spirit of unfettered and daring freedom which questions everything. In this atmosphere some of the traditional beliefs of historical Christianity cannot live; the idea of a hell of eternal and purposeless physical torment, for instance, has faded out of the minds of most thoughtful men. The result is a wide-spread feeling of doubt and disquietude throughout the Christian world, and even, it would seem, beyond its borders; for even the "unchanging East" appears to be cutting itself adrift from its ancient religious moorings.

We may be quite sure that the desire now so generally felt to *see* the truth of what one professes to believe, is a healthy one. A faith which is merely traditional, or based solely on the supposed authority of any Church, book, or religious teacher, and which does not, therefore, express the rational convictions of the believer, is likely to have but a superficial hold on his mind, and will but feebly influence his conduct. A merely conventional belief in religion will inevitably lead to a

merely conventional obedience to its dictates. The religious unrest which characterises the present age need not, therefore, be regarded as a discouraging sign. It may resemble, on a vast social scale, that period of inward doubt and debate which nearly all seriously-minded young people have to undergo when, on approaching adult life, they come into possession of independent judgment, and feel the necessity of exercising it even on those beliefs which have been impressed upon their minds from childhood as sacred. Hitherto they have accepted them without much difficulty on the authority of their parents and teachers. Now they feel irresistibly impelled to satisfy their own minds that they are true; and it is impossible for them to do this without recognising the possibility that they may be partly or wholly untrue. The mere state of doubt, therefore, is not to be condemned; but it constitutes a crisis full of danger, through which a living religious belief, or a total neglect of religion, may be ultimately reached.

In a remarkable passage Swedenborg predicted the general enfranchisement of the human mind from the bonds of a traditional and unintelligent faith which we are now witnessing, as an inevitable result of the great Judgment which, he asserts, took place in the spiritual world in the year 1757.

> The state of the world hereafter will be precisely similar to what it has been hitherto; for the great change which has been effected in the spiritual world does not produce any change in the natural world in its outward appearance. . . . But the state of the Church will be dissimilar hereafter. It will, indeed, be similar in

> outward appearance, but dissimilar internally. To outward appearance there will be divided Churches as heretofore, and there will, in like manner, be various religions among the Gentiles. But the man of the Church will hereafter be *in a freer state of thought respecting matters of faith,* thus respecting the spiritual things relating to heaven, because spiritual liberty has been restored.[1]

It seems to me probable that more people are thinking seriously about religion in the present day than ever before; but their thought, so far as it is affirmative of revelation, is hesitating and apologetic. Religious belief has lost the initiative, and can only stand almost despairingly on its defence.

We may, perhaps, epitomise the reflections of thoughtful men, who would like to have a firm religious belief, but also want some assurance that it is a true one, as follows—

"There is no disguising the fact that what is called Revelation resolves itself into a matter of personal opinion, or, if we like better to call it so, of strong personal conviction. If people accept a given document or collection of documents as constituting a Divine Revelation, they do so, if their belief has any rational basis at all, because, in their opinion, the evidence for its Divine origin is conclusive. But we constantly find that the evidence which carries conviction to one mind fails to convince another equally sincere and truth-loving, so far as we can judge. And even where the same Revelation is accepted, as in the Christian world, the interpretations given to its contents by different expositors are often at variance,

[1] *Last Judgment,* 73.

and sometimes utterly irreconcilable. The doctrines of all the Churches are supposed to be founded on Scripture. How is it possible to regard as a statement of Divine truth a collection of documents from which so many discordant inferences can be drawn? Surely, a Divine Revelation should be limpidly clear, so as to leave no doubt in the mind of any honest inquirer as to its real meaning. How is it that this supposed revelation is known only among a comparatively small portion of mankind, the rest being born and bred under the influence of false religions which, through early associations and the pressure of social environment, become so rooted in their minds that it is almost impossible for them even to look impartially at any other presentation of religious truth? Christianity is admittedly founded on certain alleged historical facts of the most extraordinary kind; yet how dubious and unsatisfactory is the evidence that they really occurred, even if it were self-consistent, which, very often, it is not! The facts are recorded in documents the authors of which, if we except some of the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, cannot be identified with any certainty. Even if they could, what assurance should we have that the writers were qualified to sift thoroughly the evidence for the wonderful facts they relate? I do not deny the possibility of miracles. No one can do so who believes in the existence of a personal God, or even in the possibility that such a Being exists. But when we examine the evidence on which we are asked to believe that the miracles recorded in the Bible actually occurred, how weak and inconclusive it seems! How can we be sure even that the non-miraculous facts it records are accurately reported? There was no shorthand writer present to take down the very words of

Jesus Christ as they fell from His lips. Apparently the Gospels were not committed to writing for many years after His death. How is it possible to feel sure that His utterances have been transmitted to us in a perfectly authentic form, without any of that insensible modification which every statement is almost certain to undergo when it passes repeatedly from mouth to mouth, especially when the people who transmit it are under the influence of fervent zeal and religious exaltation as the early Christians were? Yet what tremendous inferences are drawn from the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels! How can a rational man found his whole outlook on life, and consequently his whole conduct, on a basis so insecure? Must we not, whether we like it or not, recognise the fact that we do not know anything about the fundamental *facts* that underlie religion? Religion is a hope, not a firm assurance."

These difficulties point to the real cause of the religious unrest of the day, which arises from the fact that the belief, formerly the heritage of all Christian people, that we possess in the Bible the very *Word of God,* has become obscured, where it has not been wholly abandoned. So long as that belief survived, practically unquestioned, it created no insuperable difficulty that different men reached different conclusions as to its meaning, because every one thought that his own interpretation was correct. But the loss of this belief is destructive of all definite religious truth, because, in that case, we are thrown back on mere human opinion for our facts, than which no more unstable basis can be imagined.

These difficulties must be solved in some convincing way if Christianity is to assume that influence over

the minds of men which it ought to possess if it is true. Historical evidence, were it as abundant as it is, in fact, scanty, could never satisfy us; because the supreme need of the present day is to *see* the truth of that which we are asked to believe; and *that*, historical evidence can never enable us to do. Internal evidence, derived from the Word itself, must convince us, if anything can.

This will be the subject of subsequent chapters; but before passing to this topic it may be as well to note that none of the difficulties in which religious belief has become involved through modern scientific and historical research causes any trepidation to one who accepts the teaching of Swedenborg.

The collapse of the Mosaic cosmogony and chronology accords with his teaching that the early chapters of Genesis are a series of inspired parables, which were never supposed by the people to whom they were first communicated, ages before the time of Moses, to have any literal historical meaning.

The theory of evolution creates no difficulty, because Swedenborg taught long ago that the creation of the physical universe and of all that it contains involved processes from first to last. Nor do the discoveries of comparative anatomy and embryology disturb him in the least, because he believes that man, as to his natural mind, *is* a mere animal; that the distinction between man and the rest of the animal creation consists in the possession by him of interior degrees of mind which they have not.

The existence of stories resembling those contained in the early chapters of Genesis in the literature of non-Christian nations, might be expected if, as Swedenborg states, this part of the Bible is a portion of the

Word possessed by the Ancient or Noetic Church, which was widely spread in prehistoric times throughout the eastern world. The parabolic Word of this Church, when its true meaning had been lost through the growing naturalism of mankind, was the source of the sacred traditions of subsequent ages. The gleams of religious truth which are found in the literature of all nations come from the same source.

The new view of the non-Christian religions entirely accords with Swedenborg's teaching, which was considered highly heretical by the theologians of his day, that the Church of the Lord exists not only among those nations who possess the Word, and by it some historical knowledge of the Lord, but among the good of all religions; and that the possession of the Word by no means necessarily implies any spiritual superiority of Christians over the peoples who do not possess it.

The results of Biblical criticism cause the affirmative student of Swedenborg's teaching no anxiety, for he is convinced that the whole procedure of the critics is an elaborate *ignoratio elenchi*, or missing of the point. They are looking in the Bible for what it does not contain, and which, consequently, they will never find in it. To apply the canons of ordinary historical and verbal criticism to the Word is as absurd as it would be to apply them to the parable of the Prodigal Son. The truth of the Word does not depend on its accuracy as a historical record, but on its capacity to fulfil that sublime spiritual function for the sake of which it exists, and in its hidden contents, necessary for that function, which can only be discovered by methods appropriate to the investigation of that kind of truth.

Such a solution Swedenborg offers us. The Word, he says, carries the evidence of its Divine origin in the very

style in which it is written, and in the rational truths which can be elicited from it when its function, mode of production, and the methods by which it must be interpreted are understood. It is obvious that evidence of this kind alone can resolve the difficulties which are now perplexing us.

These explanations are not likely to carry a conviction of their adequacy at once to any mind; but at all events they cannot be regarded with the suspicion which sometimes attaches to the arguments of a theologian in a difficulty; for the statements were made by Swedenborg more than a century and a half ago, long before most of the facts which they explain were discovered.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WORD

It is often supposed that Swedenborg's system of exegesis is arbitrary and fanciful, and capable of eliciting almost any doctrine one likes out of any text. But this is a mistake. In the first place, he does not discard or disparage the literal sense of Scripture. On the contrary, in his doctrinal, as distinguished from his specifically expository works, it is almost always appealed to in its literal meaning; and it is one of his cardinal principles that all doctrine must be derived from the literal sense of the Word, and that in the letter the Word is in its fullness, its holiness and its power. His treatment, however, of the literal statements of Scripture is no less remarkable than the spiritual content which he also discovers in them. He does not found his exegesis on the New Testament only, still less on the Epistles, which have been regarded as the chief armoury of Christian doctrine, but on the whole Divine Word from beginning to end, which, if it be the Word of God, must be self-consistent throughout. On the surface this is evidently not the case. The letter of Scripture is full of anomalies, and for their elucidation a new method of interpretation is needed which will explain why these anomalies exist, how they are to be understood, and what use they serve. This explanation can only be derived from a knowledge of the fundamental facts of the spiritual cosmos. Hence Swedenborg's statement that " with-

out doctrine (or instruction) the Word cannot be understood."

The spiritual meaning which he also expounds is elicited by the application of principles of interpretation which are perfectly definite, being based on the laws of creation, and consequently on the very nature of things, and they avail for the disclosure of the inner content of every part of the Word from Genesis to Revelation. Swedenborg also shows that when the letter of the Word is rightly interpreted, it is in complete harmony with its spiritual sense.

It is impossible, within the limits imposed by this work, to give more than a very slight sketch of the process by which the Word has been given—for Revelation, like all other Divine works, is a process. It will only be possible to give an outline of the facts which need to be known in order to render that process in some degree intelligible.

Swedenborg's statement that the Word contains throughout a spiritual meaning, or rather a series of discrete meanings, cannot but seem a wild and improbable suggestion to any one who has not been convinced that his disclosures about the spiritual world, and about the purpose of creation are true ; or who has not, at least, learnt to regard them as worthy of serious consideration. Indeed, if there were no spiritual world there would be no need for a spiritual sense of the Word ; because, in that case, there would be no heaven, and the truths of heaven are contained in that sense. These meanings exist because the Divine Word is intended for the use, not only of men upon earth, but of men in heaven. It is for the sake of the angels especially that the higher meanings exist, for they are suited to their modes of thought, which can only be dimly apprehended by us

in our present state. To us the inner contents of the Word are chiefly valuable because we may be convinced by them that it is really Divine, and so be led to a faithful observance of its injunctions, as the very commandments of God.

Swedenborg attributed, in fact, a USE to the Word more exalted than it had ever entered into the mind of man to conceive. It is no other than to be the medium of communication and conjunction between the Lord, the angels of the various heavens, and men upon earth. It conveys spiritual life to mankind.

If this be true, it constitutes a new point of view from which all our ordinary canons of criticism become utterly irrelevant. The sole criterion which is of any value is the fitness of the Word to serve that sublime use in the economy of the spiritual universe which Swedenborg ascribes to it. Of this we can know nothing of ourselves; we must be content to be taught. But there are two ways of being taught, even about the highest things. One is to swallow unquestioningly what we are assured is true by some authority we deem competent to guide us, whether we are able to see its truth or not; the other is to examine carefully what we are taught, in order to discover whether it is true. This is the kind of teaching which Swedenborg commends to us. Although he gives the most precise and detailed exposition of the doctrines of Christianity that has ever been communicated to the world, and this, not as an expression of his own opinions, but as a statement of divinely revealed *facts*, he never demands our assent on any other ground than our perception that they are true. He never says, "This is true; you must therefore believe it;" but, "This is true. Convince yourself that it is so. You can, if you will."

The Word has its origin in the Divine Truth itself

as it exists in God. God is infinite love and wisdom, combined and co-operating in the production of infinite good, or use. Divine Truth in God corresponds to the understanding in man, by which the impulses of his affections are directed to the accomplishment of definite ends. It is the very form of God, through which He exercises all the energies of His love. This is the Word which "was in the beginning with God and was God," by which all things have been created and are constantly sustained.

But truth in this Divine form is utterly incomprehensible by any finite mind. Did it remain hidden in the impenetrable depths of the Divine nature it would be impotent to accomplish the purpose for which the human race was created, which is, that they may be prepared by a life of voluntary submission to Divine order during their life on earth for an eternal life according to Divine order in heaven. All order is produced by truth; and any truth that totally transcends the powers of human thought cannot enter man's conscious mind; cannot be the means by which his will is directed; cannot, therefore, contribute anything to that co-operation of man in the work of salvation, without which it cannot be accomplished. Divine Truth is constantly present in every sphere of creation, for, being Divine, it is omnipresent and indivisible; it is the principle of order everywhere. But so long as there is no fit receptacle for it in man's natural mind he remains as unresponsive to its influences as if it did not exist. In order to make its abode in finite minds truth descends from the unattainable and unimaginable infinity of the Divine nature through the same discrete degrees of substance which were described in Chapter XIII. as constituting successive steps in the order of creation; that is, it assumes

successively lower forms of manifestation adapted to the comprehension of beings of all grades of spiritual intelligence, each lower form being derived from the proximately higher, and therefore representing it. It is celestial in the highest heaven, spiritual in the spiritual or middle heaven, and spiritual-natural in the lowest; while on earth it presents itself as the Word in the letter, as we possess it in our Bible, or rather in the original texts from which our translations were made.

The apprehension of Divine truth by man follows an inverse order. It is at first natural, afterwards it may become, in a greater or less degree, spiritual, and finally may become celestial. The capacity of the human mind to ascend through these degrees of the understanding of the Word is due to the fact that it is itself constructed out of organised spiritual substances of these same degrees in their order. Man has no power whatever to affect directly the processes which take place in the spheres of mind which are interior to the natural degree, for he is totally unconscious of their existence during his life on earth. In them the Divine Providence alone works; but it acts entirely in accordance with the states of the natural mind of which man *is* conscious, and which is, therefore, under his control; because although, after death, this mind becomes quiescent, it still remains as the foundation of all his spiritual faculties, and no superstructure of interior mind can be erected upon it which is not in concord with it. Otherwise man could never become a complete *unity*, but his mind would be the scene of perpetual conflict between warring impulses.

These interior processes of mind, although subconscious, are not less perfect than those which take place within the sphere of his consciousness; they are, indeed, incomparably more perfect, because they are more

interior. Swedenborg declares that a good man, even though he may be completely ignorant of the spiritual sense of the Word, actually *thinks* according to that sense, in his inner mind, while he is devoutly reading it; and after death he comes, as it were spontaneously, into an understanding of its spiritual meaning, this being due to the fact that he has now become conscious of a higher range of mind of which he was unconscious before.

In fact, in the degree that a man *lives* according to the truths of the Word, as he is able to apprehend them during his earthly life, by shunning evils as sins against God, the Lord forms within him, without his knowledge, an interior mind endowed with organic forms capable of perceiving the truths which will be serviceable to him in the future life. This mind, when all the disturbing and obstructing influences due to life in the natural world have been removed by the process of judgment in the World of Spirits, and it is placed in an environment perfectly adapted to its nature in the heaven to which it is substantially and organically allied, receives without effort the Divine truth accommodated to that degree. No mere intellectual acceptance of truth will suffice to ensure this result. It is the life, and the life alone, that counts.

The capacity of the Word to yield these successively higher and more interior truths to minds prepared to understand, accept, and practise them, depends on the fact that it is written throughout in pure correspondences; that is, it consists of symbols derived from nature, the meaning of which can be indefinitely amplified to the extent that the mind becomes capable of discerning their significance and use. Every natural object is the product and expression in nature of spiritual causes, and therefore represents them. These causes,

were we capable of perceiving the degrees of substance through which they operate, would be seen to merge at last in the Divine; hence their capacity for an illimitable expansion of meaning. These symbols do not consist merely of the objects of animate and inanimate nature such as the sun, moon, and stars, animals, plants, and minerals, but are also constituted by man himself and all the organs which compose his physical body; and by assemblages of men, such as nations, tribes, families, and their proceedings; for every element of mind, that is, every affection which manifests itself in thought, possesses a certain personal completeness and individuality. The mind is, in fact, nothing but an aggregate of distinct affections and thoughts combined together in a societary order, just as the physical body is a collection of organs and cells, each of which is endowed with independent life and activity. The poets have seized this truth and embodied it in their imagery. Who does not see the aptness of the comparison in King John's fine soliloquy, when, tortured by the disastrous consequences to himself of the supposed murder of Arthur, he exclaims:

> My nobles leave me and my state is braved
> Even at my gates with ranks of foreign powers.
> Nay, in the body of this fleshly land,
> This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath,
> Hostility and civil tumult reigns
> Between my conscience and my cousin's death.

Experience shows how little our emotions resemble inanimate and unintelligent things. How often do we say, or think, I was *pestered* by a thought. We try to dismiss it, but it will not go. Every one, I suppose, knows what it is, when we are, as we say, *debating* a subject in our own minds, to hear with the mental ear

reasons urged *pro* and *con* which seem to be uttered without any volition of ours. Every human mind is like a stage on which in turn many actors play their parts, one advancing to take the scene, only to give place to another. Sometimes the hero of the piece plays the leading part, sometimes the villain.

All correspondence and representation depend finally on the fact that creation proceeds from a Divinely Human God, on all whose works a certain impress of humanity is stamped. Our passions behave like persons because they come to us through personal beings with whom we are constantly associated. They are, indeed, *their* passions produced into that lower range of mind in which, while we dwell in this world, our consciousness resides. They are, however, never imposed upon us as if we were slaves. They are offered to our free-will and judgment; and we accept them and thus make them our own, or reject them and treat them as hostile aliens.

Such in very brief outline is Swedenborg's doctrine of the Word. We must now turn to what he has to say about its letter, for of this, too, there is a doctrine.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LETTER OF THE WORD

It will, I think, be admitted that Swedenborg's doctrine of the Word, as thus far explained, exhibits a logical coherence which entitles it to thoughtful consideration. Given the fundamental facts of the spiritual world on which all his teaching is based, this doctrine falls naturally into its proper place in the system, and can be seen, indeed, to be an indispensable element in it. Let us briefly re-state some of the essential postulates.

1. A Divinely Human God.
2. The creation of man solely in order that the heavens may be peopled.
3. Man must co-operate in the process by which he is fitted for heaven.
4. Voluntary obedience to Divine Truth during his earthly life is the only means by which he can do this.
5. All truth enters the mind through the senses.

It is obvious that if these postulates are true, some communication of Divine truth adequate to man's needs and powers, *must* be made to him, and must be accessible to all, if the Divine purpose in the creation of mankind is to be accomplished. Revelation, from this point of view, far from constituting a difficulty, can be seen to be inevitable. There is no difficulty, therefore, in admitting the consistency of the doctrine with the rest of Swedenborg's teaching; but when it is asserted that this Divine communication is contained

in some of the books of which our Bible consists, difficulties at once present themselves.

It is a great stumbling-block to many devout minds that Swedenborg discriminates among the books of the Bible, and declares that some of them possess an incomparably higher value and authority than the rest, because they are the very Word or utterance of God. These Divinely and verbally inspired books [1] are distinguished by the fact that they convey the Divine Truth itself as it exists in God, in forms so modified as to make it in some measure intelligible to finite minds, through the heavens in their order, until finally it is embodied in natural expressions for the use of men upon earth. Swedenborg does not rank the books of the Bible which are not of this character, much, if at all, lower than the majority of devout Christians do; but he attributes to the others a far higher sanctity and use than they have ever been conceived to possess. The Epistles, for instance, form no part of what he calls "the Word," in the strict sense; but he frequently quotes from them, and shows how largely their teaching coincides with his own. Indeed he not unfrequently speaks of them as forming part of the Word in a larger sense. But they are doctrinal writings, designed to build up in the primitive Church a knowledge and comprehension of the truths on which it was to be founded. The presentation of these truths was necessarily adapted to the capacity of those to whom they were communicated, who were converts from Judaism or heathenism. A more complete and coherent statement of those truths is now possible, in the light of the facts of the spiritual world which Swedenborg was

[1] These books are, in the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel 1, 2, Kings 1, 2, Psalms, and the Prophets from Isaiah to Malachi; in the New Testament, the four Gospels and Revelation,

enabled to discern, and the wider and more accurate knowledge of the natural world which has now been attained. Besides, doctrinal writings are incapable of constituting the Divine Word in the strict meaning of the term, since this is necessarily written in purely correspondential terms, in order that it may be the Word to *all* grades of spiritual intelligences, whether existing in this world or in heaven.

Another difficulty arises out of Swedenborg's account of the process by which Divine Truth thus became embodied in the letter of Scripture. If the Divine Truth as it exists in God formed from itself those lower manifestations which fit it for reception by finite minds, and these were transmitted through the heavens in their order, until finally they were embodied in appropriate correspondential forms upon earth, how is it that the letter of the Word deals so largely with the crimes of men and nations? How, moreover, can we regard the Jehovah of the Old Testament, who commanded the slaughter of so many nations, as a revelation of the same God whom Jesus called His Father? The difficulty is a real one and demands an adequate solution.

Bad actions cannot come from God, though He permits them for wise ends. They cannot, therefore, directly represent His action, or that of the Divine Truth which He is. What we need in order to remove this difficulty is some explanation of the reasons why such expressions are used, and a key to their interpretation. It is a common saying that there is a human as well as a Divine side to Revelation. This is true, though not in the sense in which it is often understood, which implies that there is a *merely* human, and, therefore, a fallible and imperfect element in the Word. Swedenborg admits the human element, but

maintains that notwithstanding this, nay, because of this, the Word is perfect in every detail, even in its letter; not historically, but for the purposes of the supreme use which it serves.

The necessity for a human and, in itself, imperfect element in the Word arises out of the fact that it must, in its literal meaning, be adapted to the comprehension of men in states of almost utter spiritual darkness, and must appeal to such motives as they are capable of being influenced by while they are in that state. This principle of adaptation, or accommodation, can be seen to be indispensable as soon as the fact is recognised that the reformation and regeneration of man is the reason for which he exists, and that it is a *process*, in which both his will and his understanding have an indispensable part to play throughout its whole course. Every one can see that if a Divine revelation were not communicated in some language known to mankind, it would be perfectly futile. But the ideas current in any given age or among any nation, or within the reach of any individual mind, are nothing but a more interior language. If Divine Revelation were not adapted to these it would fail as completely as if it were uttered in an unknown tongue.

There are similar conditions and limitations in the motives by which a man can be influenced at any given moment of his spiritual career. They must be relative to the actual state of his mind, or they will not affect him at all. To tell a man sunk in egotism and sensuality that heaven is a place, or state, the happiness of which is due to a complete absence of self-seeking, and a delight in doing good to others, would conjure up before his mind a vision of unendurable dullness. If to such a mind the idea of a God of infinite and unchangeable

love were presented, he would either reject it as incredible, or leap to the conclusion, that however wicked he might be all would be sure to come right at last. If he were told that God punishes no one, but that evil punishes itself by infringing the eternal and immutable laws of human well-being, he would say or think, "I don't mind *that*. I'll run the risk of *that*." Thus the truth, to him, would be useless or positively harmful.

The Israelites were called God's "chosen people," and so they were; but Divine choice does not imply any special favour on the part of the chooser, nor any merit on the part of the chosen, but simply fitness for the work which is to be entrusted to them. There were reasons for the selection of this nation to perform the specific function in the spiritual economy of their era which was allotted to them. They had a great veneration for ancestral tradition, and were exceedingly anxious to secure their own worldly prosperity and that of their descendants. They consequently clung with great tenacity to the idea that Jehovah regarded them with especial favour, and designed to make them the chief of all the nations of the earth. They thought of Jehovah as a national God, just as the nations around them thought of theirs. They were, in fact, interiorly as idolatrous, even when they were practising their Divinely instituted rites, as the Gentiles; for idolatry does not consist essentially in venerating images or natural objects, but in the observance of religious forms, without any regard for goodness or truth, or any desire to possess them. Idolatry of this kind is rife in all religions, and is by no means extinct in the Christian Church to-day. The low spiritual condition of the Israelitish people is very clearly indicated by the kind of motives which were brought to bear

upon them when the Mosaic dispensation was established. The future life was not disclosed to them. The need of conversion, a radical change of heart and mind, was not set before them. The only salvation they cared for was preservation from worldly disaster. They were, accordingly, promised abundant harvests, health and long life if they were obedient, and threatened with famine, pestilence and subjugation by their enemies if they were disobedient. Such motives could not have been invoked had they been capable of being influenced by any that were higher. The Divine Providence always leads man by that which is purest and best in him. He *must* be governed through his affections, for there is no other element in his nature out of which a distinctly recognised motive can be generated. If he cannot be led by some love of goodness and truth for their own sakes, he must be led by motives of a selfish kind. The motives by which the Israelites were governed were essentially of the same character as those by which order is maintained in the hells. There no one can be led by any love for good or truth, for no one there has any conscience. The inhabitants are, therefore, kept within the bounds necessary for the maintenance of social order by external rewards and punishments just as the Israelites were. It was to men in such states as these that the Word, in its letter, had to be accommodated.

These considerations may, perhaps, be allowed to mitigate, if they do not entirely remove, the difficulty we have in view, but only to raise another. The representations of the character of Jehovah made to the Israelites in their Law *were not true*. How can we possibly conceive that the God of truth could authorise, still less utter, an untruth?

Truth is a word with various connotations which need to be accurately distinguished. There is literal, or historical truth, a statement of what actually exists, or has happened in the past. But we often speak of a work of imagination as being "true to nature"; and, indeed, the freedom of such a work from the trammels of historical fact may enable it to embody a higher and more vivid kind of truth than history does, pinned down as it is to documentary evidence, and afraid to transgress its proper limits. Again, we speak of the truth of an allegory or a parable, in which the question of historical fact is irrelevant, and that of truth to nature quite subordinate. What does it matter whether there ever was a father such as we are told of in the parable of the Prodigal Son? or whether the actions described are true to nature? They are so; but this quality only enhances the beauty and vividness of the story, and does not affect its truth, which depends solely on the question whether such a relation of forgiving love as the parable depicts really exists in God towards His sinful children. This relation is not asserted or even hinted at in the parable, but therein lies its whole truth.

Swedenborg leads us to a conception of truth still more interior and universal. It is the source of order in the whole created universe, in mineral, vegetable, and animal, and in the minds of men on earth, in heaven or in hell. For Divine Truth does not exist only in the heavens, and the world of spirits, and on earth, but passes into the hells and maintains order in them; but there it is separated from good, and is adopted, so far as it is adopted at all, from selfish motives and as a product of human prudence. Now Divine Truth could not be thus universal in its application to all possible states of human minds unless it assumed

appearances congruous with those states. These appearances are, therefore, true in their own proper sphere and no further. They are the nearest approach to genuine truth which the beings in whom they are generated can grasp. It is obvious that if the Lord did not appeal to men in the very lowest spiritual degradation in terms adapted to their state, no help would be given them. Pure truth would fail to move them. Yet they are the people who most need it. Divine Truth, therefore, puts on in revelation forms derived from the debased ideas in which they are sunk and uses them as its symbols, because no others could be understood. This is simply an application to use of the universal law that "influx is according to reception." Pure Divine Truth, free from any admixture of human frailty and error, Swedenborg tells us, cannot exist in the conscious mind of any man or angel; it is always presented under the guise of appearances consonant with and dictated by its state.

If it be granted that this is an adequate explanation of the manifest discordance between the character of the Divine Being as exhibited in the Old and New Testaments, does it not follow that the whole collection of documents in which this distorted idea of God prevails must be regarded as obsolete in the clearer light of Christian truth—at least so far as these representations are concerned?

This difficulty would be resolved if we had a key to the interpretation of those expressions in the Word which are felt by almost every devout mind that is not afraid to think about the subject, to be inconsistent with the conception of God as infinite and unchangeable love and wisdom; a key which would enable us to translate these expressions accurately into their true

meanings. For this key to exist, it is necessary that those expressions should result from the operation of a definite law of the transformation of ideas as they pass from one class of mind to another. Such a law and consequently such a key is found in Swedenborg's statement that there is nothing *original* in evil and falsity; that is, they are not entities having an independent existence, but are always *perversions* of what is good and true, owing to the perversion of Divine order in the organic forms of the human mind. Some such position must be assumed by all who feel it impossible to suppose that God is the author of evil. Man could no more create evil than he could good. He can only convert into evil and falsity that which in its source and origin was good and true.

This view commends itself to common sense; for the evils and falsities we know do not present themselves to us as an entirely distinct range of phenomena, but under appearances so similar to those exhibited by the opposite qualities that we are often unable to decide with any certainty to which class they belong. Selfish anger, anger which harbours ill-will to its object and burns to injure him, is often indistinguishable from that indignation which every just man feels when he sees wrong done, especially to the weak and defenceless. The root faculty in each case is zeal. A man would not be worth much, I think, if he could not flame up into honest rage when he witnessed the oppression of the weak by the strong, yes, and strike a hearty blow in their cause if that were needed. But such anger passes away with the occasion, and leaves no malice behind, perchance only commiseration for the aggressor as the more truly pitiable of the two; for it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it. So

hypocrisy and deceit are perversions of the power we have to refrain from expressing by word or look opinions which would be inopportune or hurtful. This is the histrionic power innate in the human mind, which preserves the privacy and inviolability of our interior thought and feeling on which depends the preservation of our freedom. So all sexual disorders arise from the abuse of powers both mental and physical, by which the sexes are enabled to unite in holy and happy marriage, and by which heaven may be everlastingly replenished with new inhabitants. Dishonesty is a perversion of the love of acquisition which is one of the most powerful motives for work, and is a good impulse when it is regulated by right principles, and controlled by religion.

Now remember that every good human quality has its prototype in God, and is one of the means by which we are able to think justly about Him, and you will see that the perversions of these prototypal virtues and excellences are capable of being accurately translated back into their original types. The anger and fury which are attributed to the Divine Being mean His zeal for good, which seeks to make it triumph by all means, however painful they may be. The worship and obedience He claims from man are not demanded for His own sake, but for man's; because all good and truth come from Him, and man's welfare depends on his recognition of this fact, and the dedication of all his powers to God's service. The punishments which He threatens and is said to inflict, represent the ills which those will infallibly bring upon themselves who seek to build their welfare on the indulgence of their own self-love and self-intelligence. The *repentance* which is sometimes attributed to Jehovah, represents

the fact that as men change in their relation to Divine things God will assume in their minds a new aspect, although in Himself He remains unchangeably the same.

Such conceptions as we have been speaking of are intrinsically false; but they were not felt to be so by the Israelites, nor by the primitive Christians, nor by our forefathers. They thought that God was really angry and revengeful; that He cast men into hell and kept them in everlasting torment, with no end in view but the vindication of His inflexible justice. They thought that His anger and vengeance were just, because He had a right to do as He willed with His own creatures. While men are in such states the idea of God as an almighty autocrat, whose decisions must be accepted simply because they are His, and He has the power to enforce them, excites no repugnance. Such ideas are, indeed, the nearest approach to a true conception of the fatal consequences of deliberately indulged evil which they are capable of making. The laws of permission were not disclosed to the Israelites, nor to the primitive Christian Church. They could not be disclosed until the spiritual world and the psychology of regeneration had been revealed, because men would inevitably have concluded that what God permitted He approved or condoned. The general idea that God rules all things, evil as well as good, was the nearest to the truth that the Israelites were capable of grasping. Jehovah was, therefore, sometimes represented in their law as commanding, or originating, deeds which He only permitted for necessary and salutary ends.

The reason why the letter of the Word deals so largely with the crimes of men and nations is not hard to see, if we remember that the spiritual meanings

it contains relate not solely, or even principally, to Divine Truth as it is in itself, but in its application to human minds, where it meets with innumerable obstacles from evils and falsities. The spiritual combats thus excited can only be described in natural imagery by wars and similar social disturbances. All temptations are conflicts in the mind in which goodness and truth are embattled against the assaults of evil and falsity, and the result must be ultimate victory for the one or the other.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SPIRITUAL SENSE OF THE WORD

It will be seen from what was stated in the two preceding chapters that Swedenborg's doctrine of the Word, if true, introduces a new point of view which must revolutionise the conceptions of Christians on that subject. The Word is unique among books in the eminence of the uses it serves, the mode of its production, and the methods by which it must be interpreted.

The principal new factors thus imported into the domain of Biblical exegesis are the following:

1. *A new fact.* The Word exists in a legible form in all the heavens.
2. *New principles of interpretation,* by the laws of accommodation, correspondence, and representation.
3. *A new use,* the transmission of spiritual life to mankind.
4. *A new evidence that the Word is Divine both as to its spirit and its letter.*

These *new* things are, of course, not new *facts,* but new knowledge about them. There are difficulties connected with each of these subjects which it will be useful to consider.

The great difficulty is the unfamiliarity of the whole series of conceptions involved. That which is novel in ideas not directly derived from the objects of sense nearly always seems incredible. This *a priori* incredu-

lity arises from the fact that our minds are not as yet furnished with a system of thought into which the new fact naturally fits. The difficulty of accepting Swedenborg's teaching about the Word is probably felt quite as strongly by religious men as by those who have little or no definite religious belief; for they are not only called upon to accept unfamiliar views, but to surrender or greatly modify many that they have long entertained, and with which their most sacred associations are intertwined. There are two considerations which should set them on their guard against the tendency to be so dominated by their prepossessions as to be incapable of weighing impartially the reasons which Swedenborg adduces in support of his teaching. The first is the knowledge how apt men are to cling to their beliefs because they are theirs. Our self-love often becomes involved even in our religious beliefs, and renders us impervious to ideas which seem to conflict with them. The second is, that if the conceptions current in the Christian world in Swedenborg's time and since were altogether correct, and adequate to the needs of the present age, there would have been no need for a new revelation to justify, explain, amplify, and illumine the old. This is no reason for accepting Swedenborg's teaching; but it is a very good one for not rejecting it without examination; for any new revelation would be certain to modify, and possibly overthrow, many conceptions which had been founded on an insufficiently comprehensive view of the fundamental facts involved. This was the case when the Lord made His advent into the world. Devout Jews, in the primitive age of the Christian Church, no doubt felt it very hard to believe that the divinely instituted rites prescribed by their Law had been super-

seded by a simpler, more spiritual and more universal form of religion. They could not see that the supersession was a development, and that the Lord came to establish the truths contained emblematically in the Law and the Prophets on a higher and more interior plane. Belief in Divine Revelation always carries with it the danger that men may identify their own interpretation of it with its real and essential meaning, and their minds be thus closed to new truths when these are presented.

We will now consider in sequence the four new elements offered to Christian thought mentioned above.

1. The Word exists in a Legible Form in all the Heavens

This statement rests entirely on the credibility of Swedenborg's experiences of the spiritual world. The believer in Divine revelation may, indeed, find support for it in Psalm cxix. 89, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is established in the heavens;" but this passage is not conclusive, because the expression "the Word" is used in Scripture with wider and narrower meanings, and this text is compatible with the former, since Divine Truth is the organic basis of every created thing. We shall see a reason for deeming the statement credible if we can rid our minds of the idea—very prevalent, I believe, though seldom expressed—that those who enter heaven will never need more religious truth than they already possess; or that, if they do, it will come to them without any effort on their part. Swedenborg says that the regeneration of man, if begun on earth, never ceases. The minds of angels continually advance in spiritual knowledge and in the

powers and uses which depend on knowledge. Now all spiritual knowledge is derived from the Word, and all truth enters the human mind, at all stages of its career, from without, through the senses. The Word, or Divine truth, as it exists in the minds of angels is imperfect. It is the highest truth which they can receive at the moment, but it is never complete, because they themselves are finite, and the Word, as it exists in God, is infinite. Unless, therefore, they were provided with some embodiment of pure Divine truth, expressed in terms which their intellects could grasp, they would be unable to progress in knowledge, and consequently in usefulness; for all usefulness depends on knowledge. Their own speculations and imaginings would no more afford them a firm ground on which to advance, than do those of men upon earth. It is a universal law that the Lord enlightens man *according to* the knowledge he possesses, and does not directly pour into his mind new knowledge.

2. Interpretation of the Word according to the Laws of Accommodation, Correspondence, and Representation

Nothing need be added here to what was said in the last chapter about the law of accommodation, which applies principally to the interpretation of the letter of the Word. The other two relate to the discovery of its spiritual sense. The laws themselves are simple enough if certain essential facts are admitted; but the difficulty of applying them is great, because the natural ideas called up by the words of Scripture, especially in the historical portions, cling to us so persistently that it seems impossible to shake them off. So long

as this pre-occupation remains, it is impossible to discern the spiritual sense at all clearly, because the mind is constantly disturbed by sceptical misgivings which becloud and enfeeble the perception of truth. There is no way of overcoming this difficulty except by patience and perseverance.

There are three postulates required for the rational comprehension of these principles of interpretation.

1. Every natural object is created by means of spiritual causes, and consequently contains them, and expresses them symbolically.
2. All the activities of mind, individual and corporate, are homologous; so that each of these classes of facts can truly and adequately depict the other.
3. No mind is isolated from other minds. Every mind is always in vital contact with others on the same plane of existence as itself, and also with others existing on different planes, superior and inferior. They are associated solely by a communication of affections and thoughts from one to another; for a mind is nothing but an organic aggregate of affections and thoughts.

If these postulates be granted, it seems to me not difficult to grasp the meaning, at least, of Swedenborg's statement, that when a man in this world reads the Word devoutly, the ideas excited in his mind arouse in the minds of good spirits and angels who are associated with him, corresponding spiritual ideas, and this by a process so easy and instantaneous that the transition is imperceptible. All that is historical in the letter of the Word, all ideas of nationality, person, place, time and circumstance vanish, and are replaced

by ideas relating to good and truth, their union and separation, and their conflicts with the opposing principles of evil and falsity. This process of transformation may be effected in the mind of a man while he is still living in this world, but imperfectly and laboriously; somewhat as he might read a book written in a language with which he is imperfectly acquainted, translating it carefully word by word, and deriving from it a meaning which he is sure is not imaginary, while at the same time he is aware that he is far from catching its finer touches as one would whose native tongue it was and who was master of all its niceties.

It is strange that this principle of interpretation should constitute such a formidable *a priori* difficulty as it does, for we all experience a very similar process of unconscious translation every day of our lives. Nearly all the terms by which we designate processes and states of mind are drawn from nature; yet we hardly think of the natural objects when we use them in this way. Any one so stupid as never to have thought of a man as possessing any other than physical qualities would be quite as much puzzled at hearing another person described as *hard*, as we are apt to be when we are told that the natural ideas of men are converted into spiritual ideas in the minds of angels. Can we not easily imagine that while a child read the *Pilgrim's Progress* to its father or mother, its mind might be wholly engrossed in the incidents of the story, while in the mind of the parent a totally different series of ideas, utterly unintelligible to the child, might be aroused?

Every one can see that the truth of a parable does not depend in the least on the historical character of the incidents it relates. Why should not a story be literally true and a parable as well? Some of the

histories contained in the Bible are so obviously of this character, that they have been universally regarded as having a figurative meaning; and for this there is the sanction both of the Apostle Paul and of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But there is an incongruity in supposing that Holy Scripture, if it really be the Word of God, contains histories, some of which have a spiritual meaning, and others none. We should get a more consistent view of Divine revelation if we could see that the whole is parabolic from beginning to end, and that this is the necessary character of Divine language. We should then not limit the description of the Lord's mode of teaching—"without a parable spake he not unto them"—to the particular occasion of which it was written; and a deep meaning would be discerned in His own utterance, "The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Few people in the present day, I imagine, regard the early chapters of Genesis as literal history; but if they form part of the inspired Word they must contain Divine truths; for it is inconceivable that the Word of God should consist of anything else. Swedenborg's explanation, that they are a remnant of a Word possessed by the Ancient Church, written in a style customary among the men of that age, in which natural images arranged in the form of a story were used solely as vehicles of spiritual truths, or as parables, is intelligible. We can also easily understand how in subsequent ages, when the spiritual insight necessary for their true interpretation had perished, the stories came to be regarded as literal history. This explanation coincides with his account of the origin of all idolatries in the images which the men of the same

Church were in the habit of erecting in their homes as representations of spiritual verities, and which were still venerated when all perception of their meaning had been lost.

The process by which the symbols employed in the Word assume higher and still higher meanings as they pass upwards from the minds of men upon earth to those of angels of the various heavens is comprehensible if the following facts are admitted.

1. Every idea which exists in the mind of a man, whether in this world or the other, has its organic basis in a modification of the structure of his brain.
2. This modification in a mind organised out of a lower degree of brain substance does not affect another organised out of a higher degree directly, by being transmitted upwards into it; but the higher mind interprets the modification in the lower according to its own laws, somewhat as in reading a book each mind gets from it such ideas as its own powers enable it to extract.
3. The actions of mind are not subject to the fixed spatial conditions which, in this world, circumscribe the actions of the body.

If these postulates are granted, it is easy to see how the ideas aroused in any individual mind may be, so to speak, *read* by any number of spirits or angels simultaneously. It is simply a particular instance of an universal law, that *all* mental states whatever ascend and descend through discrete degrees of mind; there being nothing isolated or disconnected in the mental world, any more than there is in the physical.

The system of spiritual interpretation taught by

Swedenborg involves that all the countries which were the scene of the historical events recorded in the Word, all the nations with which the Jews came into contact as friends or enemies, all the persons, places, rivers, mountains and other geographical features mentioned in it, connote definite spiritual ideas. This is not the result of an artificial system of nomenclature. The meaning inheres in the terms employed, so that they are the natural and necessary embodiments of the corresponding spiritual ideas. If this be true, the geographical characteristics of the land of Canaan and of the adjoining regions, and the history of the people who inhabited them, must have been so ordered, under the Divine Providence, that they should be capable of representing accurately the conditions under which the human mind makes its upward or downward progress ; and, while the nations and individuals whose history is recorded were free agents, and unconscious of any over-ruling destiny, their actions were so guided as to represent spiritual events, in order that the Word might be written with a true historical basis. This will not seem incredible, or even difficult to believe, to any one who has fully accepted Swedenborg's teaching about the purpose for which man is created, the perfect control of the Divine Providence over every detail of his life, and the function of the Divine Word in developing his spiritual powers. There was no more Divine care expended, so to speak, on the production of the Word than on every feeling and thought of every man at every moment of his existence. It was only the same infinite, unceasing Divine Providence directed to the production of a Book which should be wholly Divine, on the existence of which the eternal welfare of the human race depended.

3. The Transmission of Spiritual Life to Mankind

Swedenborg's teaching about the nature of life in general must, I think, commend itself to every mind which desires to gain a comprehensive and consistent view of the relation of man to his Creator. If this teaching is true, if life is essentially uncreatable; if, therefore, there is only *one* life which permeates and so vivifies *all* living creatures; if all things are organically connected with the Source whence they derive their being; if there are discrete degrees of substance through which that life flows and manifests itself; if the nature of each thing is determined by the mode and degree in which it receives the Divine influx, and man receives it in a degree which no other being shares, then it necessarily follows that the one Divine Life flows into man through appropriate and specifically human channels. These channels are, in their higher ranges, above the sphere in which man's consciousness resides, so that the life of which he *is* conscious seems as if it were self-generated, because he is aware of the effect, but is totally ignorant of the cause.

This Life, although it is Divine, cannot of itself, that is, without the co-operation of man, endow him with a spiritual life which shall be, in any sense, his own. If this were possible, man would be a mere automaton, passively swayed by the influences that played upon him. Out of such beings no heaven could be formed. Man must welcome the Divine Life, receive it with delight; and for this purpose his own mind must become a fitting receptacle for it. In the exercise of his God-given freedom he must prepare himself for its reception. He must co-operate

with the Divine purpose, altogether as if he acted by his own unaided powers. In order that he may be able to do this, his understanding must be affected. Truth must be presented to his mind in such forms as it is capable of grasping. It must arouse in him such motives as, in his actual state, can influence him. Now consider that all truth enters the mind through the senses, and you will have a key to the function of the Word in conveying spiritual life to man. Truth existing in the interior degrees of the mind must meet the truth that enters from without and be conjoined with it by the combined action of the Divine Providence and the man's free will and intelligence; and they are conjoined in the degree that he makes such truth as he possesses, be it large or small in amount, the rule by which he endeavours to regulate his daily life.

It may be admitted that these conceptions are intelligible and consistent, and, indeed, that they seem indispensable to that spiritual view of the universe which Swedenborg throughout his works propounds; and yet considerable obscurity may be felt as to *how* the Word actually *works* in the communication of spiritual life to man. The difficulty arises partly, perhaps, from the very vague notions which many people entertain about ideas, as of something fleeting, without any organic basis. Fix down in your mind the fact that every idea, like every sensation, has its organic basis in some modification of the texture of the brain, which affects its *form* or interior structure, both temporarily and permanently. Then consider that there is nothing in mind but affections and thoughts and the actions proceeding from them conjointly. Now if the substance of the mind is affection and the form of this is the basis of thought, ideas must have

structural limits just like any other organised form, though they are qualitative and not spatial limits. Anything that has definite limits, boundaries, or walls, is evidently capable of becoming a channel or receptacle for substances of its own order. A mug will not hold thought, but a brain will.

Another difficulty is this. If the Word is thus essential to the development of spiritual life in man, how is it that it is known among comparatively few of the nations of the earth, and that they do not seem to be better men than those who do not possess it?

Swedenborg's reply to the first of these questions is that the high spiritual use of the Word does not depend on its being read by every one who benefits by the Life it is the means of transmitting. Though we are unconscious of the fact, and often very indisposed to credit it, the whole human race living at any given moment upon earth forms one corporate spiritual man. It is the special function of the Church in this man, to be the custodian of the Word; but its uses are not confined to the men who constitute the Church, but are diffused throughout that larger humanity of which it forms part; just as the food which enters the body through the mouth is not monopolised by the digestive organs, but, after the necessary processes of preparation have been accomplished, is distributed to every part of the body. It matters not, therefore, that the Word should be known to and read by comparatively few. The influences it conveys are distributed among the whole of mankind and form the spiritual element in all the religions of the world.

To the second branch of the question Swedenborg's reply is that the possession of the Word by the Church does not necessarily imply any spiritual superiority of

its members to the Gentiles who do not possess it. Often they have been in much worse states, and he testifies that in his day more were found capable of being raised up into heaven from the Gentile than from the so-called Christian nations, because their minds were not so obsessed by falsities, nor had they so recklessly plunged into evils. It is never the amount of truth possessed by a man that decides his spiritual state, but the use he makes of it. All the Gentile nations possess some code of laws, resembling the second table of the Decalogue, which is sanctioned and enforced by their religion. If they obey these laws from religious, and not merely from worldly motives, this suffices to lay the foundation of the heavenly life in them, which by appropriate means can be fully developed in the other life.

4. An Evidence that the Word is Divine both as to its Spirit and its Letter

The books which are collected together in our Bible are, or were formerly, believed by the Christian world to be all verbally inspired, and consequently to possess an equal value and authority. According to Swedenborg's teaching this is an error. The essential characteristic of a *Divine* book is that it is written throughout in correspondences capable of yielding a series of continuous spiritual truths adequate to the needs of the angels of the three heavens as well as of men upon earth. Its interior meanings relate solely to the Church, Heaven, and the Lord. The most external of these inner meanings relates to the mutations which the Church on earth has undergone in various ages, and is thus an epitome of the spiritual history of man-

kind. It must be remembered that "the Church," in Swedenborg's usage of the term, does not mean, primarily and essentially, an ecclesiastical institution, or any body of men who accept a given creed and unite in common worship, but the relation in which any age, nation, or individual stands in to Divine truth, and thus to the Lord. These states are recorded in the meaning which lies nearest to the literal. It is called the "interior historical sense," and is adapted to the intelligence of the angels of the first, or lowest heaven.

In the spiritual sense proper, which is adapted to the intelligence of the angels of the second or intermediate heaven, everything relating to time, space, and person disappears, and all the symbols of the Word, whether taken from the objects of animate or inanimate nature, or from the actions of persons or nations, are translated into the processes which take place in minds that are undergoing regeneration or degeneration.

The most exalted sense, which is adapted to the intellectual faculties of the angels of the third or highest heaven, relates solely to the Lord and the glorification of His Humanity, which is the perfect example and compendium of all the states the human mind can experience in the course of its regeneration, in this world or the next.

The interior historical sense is that which is most easily grasped by men still living in the natural world, and whose thought, therefore, is of a natural kind; because they are more or less familiar with the idea that all the actions of men are the offspring of the states of their minds, and consequently express and represent them. The spiritual sense proper may also

be comprehended by them to some extent, but with much greater difficulty. The celestial sense is scarcely accessible in the present day, as it relates to affections and the innumerable modes in which they are combined, dissociated, modified or reduced to quiescence during the progress of regeneration; things which hardly come within the compass of thought or language in the existing condition of the human mind.

The Word, therefore, contains in itself the proof of its Divine origin for any mind that is capable of discerning its interior contents; for it is impossible that the writers, living at dates extending over hundreds of years, ignorant of the nature of spirit and the spiritual world, of correspondence, regeneration and the true character of the coming advent of the Messiah, should have produced compositions which treat in detail of these subjects in a continuous series, hidden beneath the literal expressions they employed and yet discoverable by one law of interpretation throughout. If Swedenborg's statements are capable of verification, we have an incontrovertible proof that the Word is no human composition, but is Divine.

When we speak of *proof*, the expression must be used with reservations. We must not suppose that if Swedenborg's statements are true we have only to get a dictionary of correspondences, learn what each symbol used in Scripture means, and we shall then be able to judge whether his teaching on this subject can be relied on. The notion at the back of this idea is that the inner contents of the Word, if they exist at all, can be discovered in the same way as the meaning of a work written in a foreign language, by mastering its vocabulary and its grammar. But this is a very erroneous view. This preparatory work must, indeed, be done. The

student must store his memory with a knowledge of particular correspondences, so acquiring, as it were, an extensive vocabulary; and he must try to grasp the principles by which these symbols are connected together in series, which is the grammar of correspondential language. But this alone will not enable him to be sure that he has elicited from the symbols a genuine and not a merely fanciful or accidental meaning. The ideas which the words of all languages connote are approximately identical, so that in studying a new language the student has only to attach, as it were, new labels to ideas which he already possesses. The ideas and processes with which the spiritual sense deals, on the contrary, are, at first, a *terra incognita*. The very conception that the human mind is an organised form, the prototype of the physical body, and that everything that takes place in it involves a process as real as any that takes place in the body, is unfamiliar. The student has not only to learn a new language, but also to acquire a perception of the ideas which the language conveys; and until he does this he will feel as if he were stumbling along among obscurities and arbitrary interpretations which he must accept without verification, if he accepts them at all.

If he surmounts these preliminary difficulties so far as to become convinced that the correspondence of natural things with spiritual things is a fact, another doubt is apt to enter his mind. If the law of correspondence is true, it must be a universal law. We do not wag a finger except by correspondence. If any historical event is truly reported we shall have a key to the spiritual causes out of which it originated, could we but use it rightly. Every book, whether it relate to actual fact or avowed fiction, will have a spiritual import. How can we assure

ourselves that the correspondences we find in the Word are of a different character from these? If, indeed, we could be enabled—as Swedenborg says he was—to read the whole Word with a continuous comprehension of its spiritual meaning, we should have the evidence we desire. But this seems quite beyond our powers. If we catch glimpses here and there of a new and fruitful world of thought, the next moment we may be again plunged into perplexity. This is partly explained by the immense complexity of the ideas which the spiritual sense contains. They are more extensive than the whole range of the natural sciences, for the Spiritual World is vastly more complex than the natural. We can only in our present state seize those ideas in their most general aspects.

Swedenborg's teaching supplies a further explanation of the ill-success of such efforts, which is unfamiliar to Christian thought and not flattering to our self-esteem. It is, that *there is grave spiritual danger in the premature disclosure to any mind of Divine truth.* The use, and the only use of truth is that it may lead to good, that is, be practised or lived. When people speak of a man as practising or living the truth, they usually mean that he regulates his outward conduct by religious principles. This is, indeed, necessary, but it does not cover all that Swedenborg means by the "life of religion." Life, in this sense, covers the whole nature of man, affection, thought, and outward conduct. There is no religious truth so abstract and philosophical as to be incapable of being expressed in terms of *life* in this sense; which will not, indeed, be utterly useless in the development of a man's spiritual nature, unless it is so expressed.

Now the truths which we can use in this vital way at any given moment are comparatively few. Every man

possesses enough truth to enlighten him as to his present duty, if he is disposed to use it in this way. He also possesses a great many truths beyond this, deposited in his memory, but not yet truths of *life* : and this too is necessary, for it holds up before him an ideal which constantly chastises the self-satisfaction to which all men are so prone, and which is one of the most insidious enemies of genuine religion. But how far any man can be admitted safely to a genuine appropriation and interior perception of spiritual truth neither he nor any other man knows, but the Lord alone. For the appropriation of truths comes solely from their being conjoined with the affections, which are the only perceptive powers man possesses. If a man were admitted to an apprehension of truths which he would not, in his then state, endeavour to incorporate in his life, it would be because some bad affection, such as self-esteem, mere curiosity, or spiritual ambition, was the ground of the perception. Such affections cannot be permanently conjoined with any truth ; as soon as the affection ceased to be gratified by the novelty of the truth it would abandon it. An influence which might have been beneficial at a later stage of the man's spiritual career would have been prematurely exhausted.

There is a more serious danger even than this. Suppose the truths were conjoined with good affections, so that they were seen in the very light of heaven, and lived as well as perceived, and the man afterwards fell away and surrendered himself to the sway of evil and falsity, which may happen only too easily without his consciously abandoning the truths or his love for them ; in this case the love of goodness and truth, and the love of evil and falsity may become so inextricably mingled in his mind as to become inseparable, and constitute

that state of profanation which is the most irremediable disaster that can befall the human mind. For in this state it is allied by its affections for good and truth with heaven and by its affections for evil and falsity with hell. It can communicate with neither without disturbance of the order reigning there, or without itself suffering torment from its own discordance with its environment; and as the conscious life of all spirits depends on the communication of affections and thoughts from others, such profaners must be reduced to a state nearly inanimate. They become skeleton minds.

It is, nevertheless, true that the first approaches of any mind to spiritual truth are made by means of affections largely compounded out of self-regarding motives. It cannot be otherwise, because it is impossible for any one to pass at a bound from a state in which he is almost completely dominated by self-love to one completely emancipated from its power. As we have already noted, no one can be led to act except by such motives as in his existing state he is capable of being influenced by. Such motives are, therefore, called into play, but they are evoked and regulated by the Lord alone, who knows how far they can be used without danger, and provides that they shall be gradually eliminated when, in the subsequent stages of man's spiritual journey, higher motives can be substituted for them. For these reasons, Swedenborg says, "It is a law of the Divine Providence that a man is not admitted to an inward perception of the truths of faith and the goods of charity, unless he can be kept in these states to the end of his life." For this reason, too, strange as the statement may sound, the function of the letter of the Word is quite as much to conceal as to reveal Divine truth. The simple truths which relate to life are clearly disclosed, but the arcana

of regeneration are concealed, and can be discovered by no self-originated effort of human reason. The Lord alone can "open the book and loose the seals thereof."

It sounds startling to be told that there is *danger* in Divine truth; but what other interpretation can be placed on that passage which is often felt to be so perplexing—"He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (John xii. 40). Here not only the perception of truth but regeneration itself is indicated as a danger, for it is impossible that the God of love should deprive men of spiritual perception or (as the case may be more truly stated) permit them to do so themselves, except for their good. We have a similar phenomenon in our natural life. The best of food if taken in excess will make a man ill, and if he persists in his gluttony long enough, will kill him. Wine makes glad the heart of man, but if he takes it in excess it will make him drunk. There are a spiritual indigestion and drunkenness due to overloading the mind with truth by indulging an appetite which is not the love of good or use, but spiritual gluttony. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* The higher the truth that any mind possesses, the greater the danger of its being perverted, and the more lamentable the consequences of such abuse.

We ought not, therefore, to be discouraged because our perception of the spiritual sense of the Word is very imperfect. It may, in spite of this, be sufficient for our needs. If an ancient inscription in some unknown language were discovered, scholars would at once set to work to decipher it by methods known to palæographers. If they were rewarded with only partial success, they

would not abandon their quest as hopeless. They might be quite sure that they had gained some insight into its meaning, although large portions of it remained obscure or unintelligible ; or, to use a homely illustration, if any one who had never seen a child's picture puzzle were to come across one in pieces, and wonder what they could mean, he would not have to put them *all* together in their proper places, to become assured what the purpose of the collection was. So if we can clearly see the spiritual sense of the Word in a comparatively few instances, it may suffice to convince us that it exists even where we cannot see it ; or at least to prevent us from denying its existence because we do not see it everywhere.

For my part, I have always found it more easy to apprehend the doctrines which Swedenborg extracts from the spiritual sense of the Word as rational principles, than to follow the method by which he extracts them. Yet I firmly believe that the interior meanings of which he speaks exist, and I will briefly indicate why, to my mind, this conviction is a rational one ; for I imagine that the mistaken supposition that if such meanings exist any one can discover them if he tries, is largely responsible for the little attention which the truths proclaimed by Swedenborg have hitherto received.

As one becomes more and more fully convinced that Swedenborg's disclosures about the spiritual world are true it becomes increasingly evident that such a Word as he declares the Bible to contain is an absolute necessity to the existence of that grand spiritual order on which all his works are based.

The more one becomes convinced that the doctrines which Swedenborg educed from the spiritual sense of the Word are true, the more impossible does it become

to believe that the method by which he educed them was illusory.

One never makes a careful study of any passage of Scripture which may seem, at first sight, to be of merely historical import, with the aid of all the light thrown on it, directly and indirectly, by the writings of Swedenborg, without discovering a spiritual meaning which seems clearly to be contained in the text and not merely read into it.

When one is reading the Word simply in its natural meaning, without any effort to discern its hidden content, the spiritual meaning often seems to shine out with complete self-evidence.

Every student of the Bible is aware what abrupt transitions there often are from one subject to another, apparently wholly unconnected with it. Swedenborg asserts that these dislocations entirely disappear in the spiritual sense, which is perfectly continuous and can alone explain why these seeming anomalies exist. This statement can, in large measure, be verified by any one who will take the pains necessary to qualify him for the work.

It is remarkable how much a strictly literal translation of the letter of the Word contributes to make it the fitting vehicle of the spiritual sense. It must be remembered that the plenary inspiration which Swedenborg attributes to the Word exists in its fullness only in the words of the Hebrew and Greek texts. The translators of our versions did not believe that there was any spiritual content beyond or within the letter in the greater part of Holy Scripture. They therefore deviated to a large extent from absolute literality, in deference to the demands of literary form, though they often put the literal rendering in the margin. The more nearly

we can approach to a literal rendering the more clearly does the spiritual sense shine forth. The mere translation of proper names often sheds a flood of light on the inner meaning.

In short, my belief in the existence of a series of spiritual meanings in the Word is founded, so far as I am able to analyse it, on an induction from many facts, none of which would, perhaps, be conclusive by itself, while the cumulative effect of all is decisive. Are not most, if not all, of our beliefs about the unseen and eternal, so far as they are the result of reasoning, based on similar grounds? It is a kind of spiritual circumstantial evidence; not the best conceivable, but the best which many of us are able to obtain, and sufficient if it is constantly growing in fullness and cogency.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE INCARNATION

It would be useless to attempt in a work of this kind to establish, or even explain in any adequate manner, Swedenborg's doctrine of the Incarnation. This would be the task of a fully qualified theologian, for it is the most sublime and profound subject treated of in Swedenborg's works. But like all other profound things, it has a simple aspect, which alone I shall endeavour to expound. My chief aim will be to remove, or at least mitigate, some difficulties which stand in the way of its reception and even of its consideration. Before passing to this subject, however, it is necessary to revert for a moment to the spiritual history of mankind, which is its essential history, and the only history that really matters. The essential factor in every age is the relation of the people who live in it and compose it to Divine truth.

Swedenborg teaches that man came into existence as a spiritual being in a state but little differing as to his natural mental powers from that of the tame and gentle among the higher animals. The essential difference was that there were contained within and above his natural faculties three interior degrees of mind, which could be successively developed and perfected within him during his life on earth, and form the substantial and organic basis for his introduction, after death and his sojourn in the world of spirits, to one or other of the heavens. Beginning in this, as it

were, infantile state, the race, or part of it, was led upwards by a gradual process of spiritual elevation and development, always in perfect freedom. This was long anterior to the dawn of history, and the only record we have of it is in the first chapter of Genesis, which deals, not with the creation of the visible universe, but with the spiritual creation or regeneration of the human race, which finally attained the highest point of spiritual elevation it has yet reached, in what Swedenborg calls the Most Ancient or Celestial Church, represented by Adam (the Hebrew word for generic man) in the Garden of Eden (or delight). Gradually this Church deteriorated and became corrupt, and was at last superseded by a new Church to which was entrusted a lower order of truth, better adapted to the lower spiritual state to which the remnant of the good had fallen. This process of gradual declension continued, until at last the Israelitish Church was established, which was not a spiritual Church at all, but rather the representative image or symbol of a Church; all the religious precepts, rites and ceremonies imposed upon the Israelites being devoid of any spiritual significance in their minds.

Swedenborg uses the term "Church" in two senses. He often speaks of the "Universal Church," consisting of all throughout the whole world who according to their lights are striving to do good and understand and obey the truth. But besides this, or rather, as the central heart in this spiritual organism, there has always existed what he calls a "Specific Church," which is the depository and custodian of the Word. It is of specific Churches that I have been speaking as following one another in a descending and deteriorating series. The Word existed in these Churches

in various forms, while remaining essentially the same. But in the Israelitish Church it assumed the lowest and most external form possible, that of moral laws and ceremonial observances which represented heavenly things, apart from any perception of their purpose and meaning in the people on whom they were enjoined. Nevertheless this religion of mere rituals and external rules of conduct sufficed to maintain that connection between the heavens and men upon earth on which the spiritual stability of both depend; for when the laws which the Israelites were commanded to obey were duly and religiously observed, the thoughts of the worshippers excited in the minds of good spirits who were associated with them, ideas of the heavenly realities themselves which they represented. These ideas were transferred upwards to the minds of the angels of the various heavens and formed a basis for their thought; so that by means of this artificial system of communion, as it may be called, heaven and earth were still conjoined. When this Church in its turn became corrupted, the very lowest foothold of Divine truth on earth was in danger of being destroyed, and the salvation of man rendered impossible. This was the reason why God Himself became incarnate on this earth as the Word made flesh; and the central theological doctrine of Swedenborg is, that the Lord Jesus Christ in His glorified Humanity is the one God who alone is to be approached and worshipped.

I am aware how incredible this doctrine is apt to appear even to those Christians who believe in the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. I can sympathise with this feeling, for I had it myself for many years after I began the study of Swedenborg's writings, and had reached the conviction that as representations of

the nature and constitution of the spiritual world they must be essentially true. I not only could not accept this doctrine, but I was unable to conceive of any process of thought by which I could be led to believe it. Now it seems to me the most simple, and, so to speak, natural thing in the world. I can hardly tell how I acquired this belief. I doubt whether any of us can ever fully explain even to ourselves, much less to others, the process by which we reached our deepest convictions. They come from a gradual shifting of outlook, which takes place so insensibly that we are hardly aware of the change, except when from time to time we look around us and see where we were, and where we are. Our convictions seem to "grow and spring up, we know not how." When we have got them we reason about them, explain, and justify them; but our reasons, explanations, and justifications always seem to us a very inadequate account of the process by which we attained them, or of the power with which they dominate our minds.

Since I have reached this belief, I have been able to perceive the nature of some of my early difficulties more clearly than I could before. This can be a matter of but slight interest to any one but myself, except in this respect, that human minds, with all their infinite diversity, move so much in similar grooves of thought, that it is probable that many other people may be hampered by the same difficulties without being fully aware of their nature, just as I was; and there is a real gain in stating a difficulty clearly, for this is often the first step to its removal. There are, it seems to me, four main difficulties that arise out of the doctrine of the Incarnation taught by Swedenborg.

The first and the most formidable is an undefined

but almost irresistible feeling, nearly devoid of reasons, that it is simply inconceivable that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe should have become incarnate upon the earth.

The second is that the conception seems inconsistent with the facts recorded in the Gospels about the life of Jesus Christ.

The third is that the explanation proffered by Swedenborg involves the belief that God *acquired* by Incarnation a power which He did not possess before.

The fourth is that we fail to perceive any adequate reason for such a Divine intervention.

The first difficulty, when analysed, will be found, I think, to resolve itself into two main elements. The ideas which many people form of God are so vague, or so permeated with the idea that omnipotence must involve the power to accomplish *anything* by a mere *fiat*, that the very conception of Him as a *worker*, by processes, for definite ends, which are not necessarily accomplished because the ends and processes are Divine, causes a shock of surprise, and is apt to excite that irrational incredulity with which the unfamiliar, especially in spiritual things, is generally received by human minds. Yet the " works " of God are frequently mentioned in Scripture. Jesus Himself said : " My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work " (John iv. 34) ; and : " My Father worketh even until now (R.V.) and I work " (John v. 17). What meaning or efficacy, indeed, would infinite love and wisdom have unless they manifested and ultimated themselves in infinite work or use ? If nothing but a mere *fiat* were necessary for the accomplishment of Divine ends there would be no need for work. All work implies a resisting or re-acting medium. This

medium in Divine work is the human mind, in which the will is capable of acting against God and the understanding is capable of thinking adversely to Him.

But the chief element in this difficulty comes, I think, from our not really believing that God is love, infinite love; or at least from our failing to grasp the truth in the sense in which Swedenborg would have us believe it. We must not form our conception of this love on the model of that tender feeling of personal preference to which we usually apply the term. It is the *love of doing good,* infinitely and to all alike. This love is the very substance of God. It *is* God. His wisdom is but the form and manifestation of His love, and all the uses which exist in the created universe are derived from His love, through His wisdom, just as all the uses which a man performs are derived from his will, or affections, through his understanding as means. It is the nature of all true love to desire to *give* rather than to *get.* It derives its satisfaction and delight from giving. If this is true of human love at its best, how infinitely true must it be of that Divine love in which all true human love has its source. God is a Being whose whole nature is concentrated in the impulse to give—to give Himself, for He has nothing else to give—to give Himself totally, were it possible; but, in any case, to give Himself as fully as the receptive faculties of each human mind will permit. The physical universe is created solely that men may be brought into existence upon it, and after their brief life on earth pass into the heavens, which will never cease to grow in numbers and spiritual beauty to eternity. This is the central purpose of creation, and its realisation was in jeopardy. The intervention which seems to us so incredible must have been as natural and inevitable,

so to speak, to the Divine Being as the action of a human father in snatching his child away from some danger. Love does not feel the energies it puts forth on behalf of the beloved object as a burden or privation. The privation would be if it were not permitted to exercise those powers when they were needed.

Christianity alone among the great religions has dared the conception of a "meek and lowly" God. No one who attributes any Divine authority to the words of Jesus Christ can deny that it does so; for He invited all men to come to Him because He was meek and lowly in heart, and He also said: "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge" (John v. 30); and: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John xiv. 10). Infinite love *must* be infinitely meek and lowly. For what is it to be genuinely meek and lowly but to be devoid of every trace of self-seeking or self-regard?

This difficulty, therefore, I take it, has no existence except in our own minds, and comes from the imperfection of the ideas we form of the Divine goodness.

Its Consistency with the Gospel Records

The second difficulty is based on the seeming incompatibility of Swedenborg's teaching on this subject, with the records we possess of the life of Jesus upon earth. How is it possible to conceive that He, who prayed to His Father, could, interiorly, as to His soul, be that very Father?

Here we may be helped by a comparison with the process of human regeneration, which is a finite, partial, and imperfect image of the Lord's glorification. There

are in every man from birth, above the degree of his mind in which his consciousness resides, three interior degrees of mind, corresponding to the three heavens. In every good man, one or more of these degrees is by regeneration opened, or made functionally active, and capable of becoming the seat of consciousness. He does not become conscious in that degree of his mind until after death, when he has undergone a preparation in the World of Spirits, and enters the corresponding heaven. But the opened degree does not remain inactive till then ; it acts by influx into the natural degree of his mind, and profoundly influences his affections and thoughts. Now the consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ during His life on earth was in the natural degree of His mind, and all the interior process of glorification which went on throughout His whole life only affected His consciousness in that degree ; but in that degree His consciousness alternated between two states, as the glorified Humanity or the remains of the infirm humanity derived from the mother predominated in it. He consequently felt, while under the influence of His hereditary Human, as if He were left to Himself, just as we do. He realised His entire dependence on the Divine within Him just as we do, only incomparably more fully. He prayed to the Father as to another being. He felt despair, and that He was forsaken by God. It was only when the process of glorification was accomplished that He could say : " All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." No touch of human weakness given us in the Gospels and elsewhere can be spared from the picture, if we are to realise the truth that the humanity which the Lord assumed by birth was exactly like ours in every aspect, except that it had no finite paternal heredity other than that which it derived

indirectly through Mary; and consequently the consciousness of His Divine nature and mission was a gradual growth in His mind, and subject to obscuration and temptation. Until Jesus was fully glorified there was a real separateness of being between the human nature which He assumed by birth, and the Divine, or the Father, within Him.

Can God acquire Power?

The third difficulty is that the conception of the Incarnation proffered by Swedenborg involves the belief that God thus acquired a power which He did not possess before, and which He could not have acquired in any other way. I think this is a true statement of the case. Swedenborg does teach that God by this means assumed and incorporated in His own nature a degree of being which had been only potential in Him before. How can we conceive that the Infinite God *became* something that He was not before?

Swedenborg has not, so far as I am aware, ever directly faced or explained this difficulty. He seldom does explain difficulties, though he often remarks that they exist for natural thought. Perhaps he saw none. Perhaps there are none, except in our own minds. I can only, therefore, suggest an explanation—based on his statement that the Divine natural degree assumed through Incarnation was *potential* before—which has satisfied my own mind. If we press to its extreme logical consequences the idea of the Infinite as not only embracing all power that exists, but as excluding every form of development or process, we shall inevitably arrive at the idea of a God who does nothing; for all action is something new. As to His essential nature as being infinite, self-existent love and wisdom, and con-

sequently infinite power or use, He cannot change; but it is quite possible to conceive that He changes infinitely in the manifestation of these attributes, in accordance with the changing states and needs of human minds. We may, perhaps, borrow a helpful illustration from the work of a human educator; for religion is nothing but God's method of educating men for heaven, and His methods must be adapted to the various states and powers of human minds, just as the efforts of a human teacher must be; because God seeks to educate all men through their free exercise of the powers He gives them. Every good teacher tries not only to make his teaching true, and as complete as the capacity of his pupils will permit, but also to adapt it to the idiosyncrasy of each pupil's mind. If he were *perfectly* equipped as a teacher, and had *no* limitations or disabilities in himself to hamper him, that is, if the love and wisdom he possesses and which are his qualifications for teaching were *entirely* adequate to the work in which he is engaged, he would be able to adapt his teaching to the special needs of each pupil. In other words, the more permanent and perfect his love and wisdom were, the more he would *seem* to change, and in fact would change, in his exhibition in his work of those fundamental qualities. Thus, I think, we must admit into our conception of the Infinite God not only immutability in His essential attributes, but infinite mutability in their manifestation. We must recognise infinite potentiality as well as infinite actuality as existing in the Divine.

When we try to think of the acquisition of power by God, we must be careful to found such ideas as we may be able to form on an appropriate conception. There are several kinds of power. There is physical power which if sufficient in amount will overcome any obstacle.

There is mental power, resulting from an intense concentration of purpose aided by a thorough knowledge of the means by which other minds may be influenced. A mind of this order may so dominate other minds as to deprive them of their freedom and make them passive instruments in its hands, even while they are acting, so far as their consciousness can tell them, in freedom. Such a hypnotic possession seems to be exhibited by the German nation in the present war. In neither of these kinds of power can the right symbol be found ; for the Divine Being possesses all power and could never lack the ability to exercise any control which it would be consonant with Divine love and wisdom to impose. But besides these there is the power of love and wisdom, which is wholly averse to compulsion, whether physical or mental, and desires only to lead others in the right path in freedom. If it resorts to compulsion, as is sometimes necessary, it is always with a view to the restoration of freedom when the compulsion has done its work. Here, perhaps, we may find an appropriate symbol by which to think of the acquisition of power by God. For all such leading involves a certain adaptation or condescension to the state of the person who is to be led. He who would teach a child must himself become a child for the nonce. He who would teach an ignorant man must himself become, as it were, ignorant, or he will fail to reach his pupil's mind. In this condescendence love has no sense of condescension. It is then in its element and life. There is only a verbal antithesis in the words, " I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit " (Isaiah lvii. 15). The true relation of the clauses is that of sequence. One use of this descent of the Divine into our nature is indicated in the Epistle to the Hebrews, " In that he

himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (ii. 18). This descent was not only an isolated historical event, but is perpetual and universal in the history of humanity. Nor are the benefits of the greatest event in the history of mankind confined to the good, but extend to the wicked also, even in the hells; for there too the Lord is present, and leads their inhabitants to such good as they can be brought to embrace in freedom.

The Necessity of the Incarnation

The fourth difficulty arises from our inability to perceive the need for this supreme Divine intervention. How could it be necessary for God, who possesses infinite power, to make His advent on earth for the redemption and salvation of mankind? The explanation commonly given in the Christian world has been, that it was to save mankind from the punishment due to them for their sins by inflicting it on a perfectly innocent being. People are beginning to see how false this idea is—how totally unsupported by Scripture. But when this misconception is rejected it becomes difficult to conceive the need for a Divine Incarnation. If its sole object was to communicate certain truths to mankind, and to set an example of a divinely ordered human life, could not a supremely good man have lived such a life as Jesus lived, and spoken such words as He spoke, and died such a death as He died? There is no answer to this question if the earthly life of Jesus is supposed to have been lived merely for the purpose of example and instruction. But these, according to Swedenborg's teaching, were not the whole, nor even the chief part, of the work accomplished by His coming. The main

purposes were to effect a great judgment in the spiritual world, and to glorify His human nature and make it Divine, and thus secure spiritual freedom for mankind for ever.

I have already spoken of the successive Churches, or dispensations of Divine truth, which have existed upon earth. Those which succeeded the Most Ancient Church marked distinct steps in the Fall of man—his higher faculties being successively closed, and apparently obliterated, because they had been abused and perverted. The human mind was therefore reduced to a lower level of spiritual faculty and endeavour, which was still open to it, though the higher level had become impossible. Now it is characteristic of every falling Church that great multitudes of its members pass into the world of spirits in very complex states, in which good and evil, truth and falsity, seem to be inextricably mixed together in their minds. This intermediate state, which is man's first destination after death because he has dwelt there as a spirit during his earthly life, is, as it were, the digestive apparatus of the spiritual world, where the extraction of the essential elements of character from the temporary elements in which they have been hitherto embedded is accomplished. It is, therefore, the place of judgment, which consists simply in the disclosure of what each man really *is*, that is of what he really *loves*, and the reduction of all his subordinate powers to complete conformity with his love. For in the other world, Swedenborg says, no one can have a divided mind. He either loves good and understands truth, or loves evil and understands falsity. There must be a perfect equation between the affections of the will and the perceptions of the intellect, so that the one becomes the counterpart and helpmate of the other.

If it were not so the order which reigns throughout the spiritual world would be destroyed, because a man might be allied with heaven by truths in his understanding, and with hell by evils in his will, and thus be incapable of removal to that specific, permanent place in the spiritual world where, if he is good, all the potentialities of his nature for the performance of uses can be best developed, and such amelioration of the state of the wicked as is possible may be brought about.

Now during all the successive Churches hitherto there have been three classes of inhabitants of the world of spirits.

1. Those who were so definitely established in the love of good and truth that after a longer or shorter preparation there they could be admitted to heaven.
2. Those who were so irrevocably fixed in the love of evil and falsity that, after a like preparation, they could be removed to hell.
3. Those who were in such mingled states that they had to be detained in the World of Spirits until the close of the dispensation to which they belonged, when a great judgment took place, by which that region was cleared of most of its inhabitants, whose internal state was then made manifest, so that they could be removed to their final destination, either in heaven or in hell.

This accumulation of spirits in the intermediate state produced an effect upon the spiritual perceptions of mankind like that of a fog or mist upon a man's natural sight. It obscured the rays of the Sun of heaven, which, passing down through the heavens, reached man's mind finally through spirits in the world of

spirits. Such an accumulation of spirits tends greatly to increase in every falling Church, and especially towards its end or consummation. For a falling Church does not openly abandon its religion, but makes it subservient to pride, self-seeking, and the lust of power. Its members suppose that they are very religious men, and they often have a very ardent zeal for many of the doctrines of their Church—not for the sake of the doctrines themselves, but because of the influence over the minds of others they are able to exercise by means of them. This accumulation of spirits, predominantly of an evil character, in the world of spirits, also gave the hells a firmer foothold in that world, and consequently a more powerful influence over the minds of men; so that evil at last tended to overwhelm good, and the spiritual freedom of mankind was in danger of being destroyed. At such an epoch even the "powers of the heavens" are shaken; for the Church in heaven rests upon the Church on earth as its foundation.

Every such judgment consisted essentially in a more powerful outpouring of Divine Truth through the spiritual world, in a form adapted to the states of those in the world of spirits on whom the judgment was to be effected. For it is always the truth that judges—or that by which man judges himself. The judgment consists in the disclosure of the man's true relation to Divine truth when his inmost affections are fully opened up, and made to dominate his whole being.

Now when the consummation of the Jewish Church approached, the efflux of Divine Truth through the heavens was not powerful enough to effect the judgment in the world of spirits, and the reduction of the hells to due order, which were necessary to restore

mankind to spiritual freedom, and set the race upon an upward path after the long spiritual declension of the Fall. Therefore it is written in Isaiah: "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him: and his righteousness, it sustained him" (lix. 16).

This intervention meant that the Divine should actually approach—not in space, but in spiritual state—should actually come down to the level of spirits in the world of spirits and in the hells; for there can be no action without contact. Now it is impossible for the Divine as it is in itself to come into immediate contact with any finite being. The influx of Divine Love and Wisdom even into the highest heaven has to be tempered by various media, because otherwise the angels there could not sustain it. How much less could the Divine approach sinful men and evil spirits without utterly consuming them! It was necessary that He should assume a humanity analogous to theirs, on the same plane of substance as theirs, in order that He might be able to reach them at all. He did this by birth of a virgin mother. Through her He derived the tendency to all the evils which have ever afflicted humanity, so that, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin" (iv. 15). Through this infirm humanity He could come, as it were, into personal contact with spirits, and even with the hells, and effect the judgment that was needed.

The Christian Church has hitherto shrunk from the admission that the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, which He inherited by birth from a human mother, was *exactly* like ours; that it contained all

the tendencies to evil that ours does. Yet our Lord's own words (Luke xxii. 28), as well as those just quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews, show that He was tempted. Now temptation necessarily involves two factors: an internal tendency, something in the mind that renders evil and falsity attractive, and an external stimulus. If either of these were absent no temptation could exist. If a man had not the slightest inclination to get gain by dishonest means he would not be in the least tempted by an opportunity of appropriating the goods of another, even if he felt he could do so without any risk of detection.

The difficulty of conceiving that any kind of evil could exist in the Lord Jesus Christ arises from our failing to distinguish between a tendency to evil and evil itself, or sin. We are not sinners because we have tendencies to evil, for these come to us without any act of ours, through our parents and ancestors in a long series. They become sins when we adopt them, and make them our own, by loving and practising them.

We must beware of supposing that because the Lord's temptations arose out of hereditary conditions like ours, they were therefore in all respects comparable to those which we experience. The common idea of temptation needs, indeed, to be revised before it can become a fitting symbol by which we may approximate to a right conception of those which He endured. In ordinary parlance temptation is an inclination to do something wrong; and if it is resisted the temptation is supposed to have been overcome. But a crisis of this kind does not necessarily involve any element of spiritual temptation. The decision may be the result of a calculation by the tempted man of worldly consequences to himself should he yield to his inclination,

Spiritual temptation exists only when good and evil, or truth and falsity, contend for the mastery in the same mind. This can only happen when conscience, or a genuine preference for good as opposed to evil, and truth as opposed to falsity, has been in some measure formed, for it is the conscience that is assailed; and the temptations to which a regenerating mind is exposed become more interior and distressing as its conscience is developed and made more sensitive, and thus includes a wider range of truths united to and vitalised by affections. These interior temptations have often no apparent relation to external conduct. The most terrific inward strife may exist in the mind of one who is going about his daily duties with the utmost composure.

The use of temptations is that they lead a man to a growing knowledge of the secret recesses of his own nature, and finally to the heartfelt acknowledgment that in himself there dwells no good thing; that all the good and truth he can ever possess must be the Lord's in him.

This conviction can never be generated in any man except by an active and energetic struggle against those bad tendencies in himself of which he is aware, carried on precisely as if the powers by which he acts were altogether his own, or self-derived. This is the only basis of the reciprocal relation which has to be established between himself and the Lord.

All these temptations to evil and falsity are injected into our minds from evil spirits through spirits in the world of spirits with whom we are in immediate association, and who are as unconscious of the influence they exert upon us as we are. All such influences are permitted and controlled by the Divine Providence

for the purpose of awakening in us a consciousness of the inherent evils of our nature; because if we never knew them through such experiences we should be unaware of their existence and could never resist them, nor consequently be delivered from them. Temptations are *trials, tests,* which show how much of vital religion a man possesses; and the vigour and patience he displays in resisting them are the measure of the completeness with which the evils they disclose can be eliminated from his affections, which are their seat, and the source of all their power.

If these conceptions are grasped they will enable us to form some faint and inadequate idea of the temptations which the Lord endured during the whole of His life on earth. They were like those which men experience in these respects—that they arose out of an influx from the spiritual world into the hereditary, perverted spiritual-organic forms of His maternal Human; but unlike ours they were not occasioned only by evil spirits, but by good spirits and even angels—and these were the most interior and distressing of all; for they did not present themselves in the guise of manifest evils and falsities, but of a fallacious good and misleading appearances of truth.

The chief respects in which the temptations of men who are undergoing the process of regeneration differ from those which the Lord endured are these.

In their case spiritual temptation does not begin until they enter on adult life; for, till that time, an independent conscience, or sense of truth, has not been formed within them. There is, indeed, an immature and rudimentary form of conscience formed in children from the instruction of parents and teachers; but this is rather a reflection of the conscience of others

than their own. A true conscience is generated only when the mind becomes capable of forming an independent judgment in spiritual things. But in the Lord's case conscience was connate, from the Divine Love which was His life. He therefore could be and was admitted to spiritual temptations from early childhood.

Every man has fallen in temptations and fallen repeatedly. Indeed, of himself he is constantly falling, even when he thinks himself most completely victorious ; for he does not know his own inmost motives, nor how defiled they are by the ideas of self-sufficiency and merit. But he is constantly raised up by Divine power, so far as this can be done without infringing his freedom, which is his essential manhood. But the Lord never yielded in the slightest degree to the most distant and insidious solicitations of evil or falsity. His whole life was a perpetual and complete victory in temptation.

We are admitted to a knowledge of only a few of the evils that are latent in our hereditary nature. The greater part remain quiescent, or, at least, unrecognised, during our whole lives. We are only required to resist and overcome the few we do recognise. He took upon Himself our nature, defiled as it was with the evil tendencies accumulated in it since the creation. *All* these were gradually opened up to His consciousness. He was thus brought into contact with *all* the hells. He met and overcame them all.

The evils and falsities of men are never wholly eradicated. They are only, in those who are regenerate, kept in subjection and reduced to quiescence by Divine power, and thus *apparently* extirpated. The one condition essential to this Divine and perpetual subjuga-

tion of a man's hereditary and acquired evils is that he shall *love* to have them thus subdued. "It is heaven to the angels," Swedenborg tells us, "to be withheld from the influence of their own Self." But in the Lord's case evils and falsities were totally cast out.

In all our temptations there is an admixture of self-love which helps to sustain us in the conflict. It is our *own* salvation, our *own* purification that we battle for. This element is necessary, because without it we should never be induced, especially at first, to struggle at all. But in the Lord's temptations this element was totally absent. That Divine Love which contains not the least trace of any self-seeking motive was His very life. He could not even think of overcoming evil as a good for Himself. He saw and felt that in the conflicts He endured, the salvation of mankind was at stake. "For their sakes," He said, "I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." It was this that caused the almost insupportable, and to us utterly inconceivable agonies He endured, not only on the cross, but, with intermissions, throughout His life upon earth. For in all temptation there is doubt as to the issue. If there were none, there would be no temptation.

If we can firmly grasp the two extremes of the Lord's life on earth, the beginning as a little babe, with no more knowledge than any other child possesses, and the end, when He said, after His resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," we shall see that the very process of His glorification must have led Him into temptations of the most terrible kind. For the consciousness of His Divine powers and mission must have dawned upon Him gradually, and have been subject to obscuration and doubt, and thus to tempta-

tion. The nature of these most interior conflicts is indicated in the story of His temptation in the wilderness, which is not to be regarded as an isolated incident, but as a summary in parabolic form of all the temptations He experienced. The tempter assailed Him with *truths from the Word,* and He resisted the temptation by truths from the Word. The purport was a doubt whether He might not use the Divine powers with which He felt Himself endowed for the rescue of mankind, by finding some easier way than that of simple obedience to the laws of Divine order, which seemed to Him, in that state, unrealisable. Must man be left to make his own heaven or his own hell in perfect freedom? Could not some easier path be found than the strait and narrow way which leads to life?

I take it that this explanation of the necessity for the Incarnation must be admitted to be adequate, if Swedenborg's representations as to the purpose of creation, the constitution of the spiritual world, and its state at the time our Lord was present in bodily form upon earth are true. But this purpose of the Incarnation was, in a sense, temporary. There was an eternal purpose as well. This was the glorification of the Lord's Humanity, so that every finite element in it, that is, everything it derived through the Virgin Mary, was utterly expelled, and His Humanity became Divine and therefore Infinite. This implies that the Divine actually assumed *during His manifestation upon earth* a Humanity not *derived* from man, but which was, nevertheless, on the very plane of man's natural life; so that thereafter those Divine influences on which the spiritual welfare of mankind depends, might descend, not only through the channel of the spiritual world, but also directly from God Himself. The First became also the Last. Now it is

obvious that the humanity which the Lord assumed by birth from a human mother was finite. He was born as a little baby, with no more knowledge than any other child. We are expressly told that He increased in wisdom and stature. He ate, drank, was weary, and slept like another man. How can we possibly conceive that this finite nature became infinite?

Swedenborg recognises that the transmutation of the finite into the infinite is impossible. How, then, was the change effected? It could only be accomplished in one way—by the *putting off* of the finite substances and forms which the Lord assumed by natural birth, and by His replacing them, as they were put off, by substances and forms from the absolute Divine, or the Father, within Him. Thus when the process of glorification was accomplished He was no longer the son of Mary. He was then glorified with "the Father's own self" (John xvii. 5).

This process of glorification would have been impossible but for the fact that Jesus had no human father. A father's share of parentage contains a propagation from his soul, in all its degrees, and is the inmost formative power in the newly created human being. This germinal soul is necessarily finite like that from which it is derived. The body or clothing of the inner human form is supplied by the mother. We are all familiar with the fact that as regards the visible, physical body this is the case. But it is a constant law, of which many examples might be given did space permit, that whatever is transacted visibly in outward nature is also transacted invisibly in interior nature. There must be a paternal and a maternal element in every cell composing the human body; otherwise the sum of the cells would not present the paternal or the maternal likeness,

and sometimes both, so clearly as it sometimes does. Throughout the body, in its least as well as its greatest parts, the paternal element is interior and the maternal exterior, and the same is true of the mind and of all the elements composing it. Now in Jesus Christ the paternal element was wholly Divine. The Father, the Infinite, uncreate Divine was His soul. That infinite natural Humanity which He assumed during His life in the world was something quite distinct from that which He assumed by birth. It was derived, not from the Virgin Mother, but from the Divine itself within Him.

The Christian Church has hitherto, in the main, regarded the Lord Jesus Christ as a kind of subordinate God, existing prior to His Incarnation as one of the Persons of the Trinity. This conception avoids no difficulty, for it is no more easy to conceive of the Incarnation of such a Divine and therefore Infinite Being, than it is to conceive of the Incarnation of the One God; whereas it is destructive of any simple and unambiguous acceptance of the truth that God is One. Yet this forms part of the first and great commandment: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One Lord," and this commandment must be meant for our thought, and not merely for our lips. In the teaching of Swedenborg the Trinity becomes a real tri-unity, instead of a tri-personality, and offers no more impediment to our thinking of God as One in the most absolute sense, than does the conception of a man as consisting of spirit, body, and their united operation to the idea that *he* is one. Mystery remains, indeed; profound mystery! Man is a mystery, nature is a mystery, everything is mysterious. Only the mind that is stupefied by custom fails to see the mystery that envelops the most familiar things. A divinely created universe must be mysterious

to every finite mind, if for no other reason than this, that it must contain infinite uses which in their totality and in their details can never be discerned by it. But it need not involve inconsistency and contradiction, which are not mysterious at all, but altogether anomalous and *un*-natural, and clear indications that we have somehow gone astray from the facts of the case.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD, AND A NEW CHURCH

PERHAPS the most formidable obstacles which have to be encountered in the study of Swedenborg's teaching by a devout believer in historical Christianity, arise out of these two doctrines.

The Christian Church has been looking forward ever since its foundation to a Second Advent of the Lord, when He would appear in glory. The primitive Church expected this event to take place in their own time. As centuries rolled by the expectation became dim; but it has revived and faded away again from time to time, until in the present day it has practically dropped out of sight, as an enigma which must be left to the event for its solution. Associated with this expectation was the belief that at the second Advent a great judgment would take place on all mankind, whether deceased or still living in this world. For this purpose the dead would be reinvested with their earthly bodies, the whole universe would be destroyed, and a new one created, and the visible reign of the Lord on the earth would begin. It is much more difficult for an intelligent man to entertain such ideas in the present day, when the earth is known to be comparatively an infinitesimal speck in an illimitable universe, than it was to the early Christians, to whom the earth with its satellites and spheres *was* the universe. Nevertheless the expectation seems to be justified by the statements of Scripture, if these are to be literally understood.

Swedenborg declares that these ideas arose out of a misunderstanding of the predictions in which the second coming of the Lord is foretold—a natural and, indeed, an inevitable misunderstanding, for the time had not yet come when the true nature of the Divine Word could be disclosed. The Apostolic writers participated in the mistake; for although they were empowered to present the truths of Christianity in forms adapted to the apprehension of its adherents in that age, the nature of the succeeding dispensation was not disclosed to them, as it formed no part of the work they were commissioned to accomplish.

The second coming was foretold in symbolic or correspondential language, which was understood by the Christians of that time literally, although, strangely enough, the apostles seem to have interpreted the very similar prophecies of the first coming of the Lord in a spiritual, or at least a figurative sense.[1] Their office, so far as it related to the second advent, was to keep alive in the Church the belief that another manifestation of the Lord was to take place in the future. Only the event itself could explain what the nature of that manifestation was to be. It was not to be a reappearance in finite, personal form before the physical eyes of men, but a revelation to their spiritual sight. Whatever could be accomplished by the former for the spiritual restoration of mankind was effected once and for all by His advent in the flesh. The second coming of the Lord consisted in a new revelation of Himself in His Word, by the opening up of its spiritual meaning and use, and an exposition of its teaching both in its letter and its spirit which should enable human minds to attain a rational conviction that its teaching is Divine. Con-

[1] Acts ii. 16-21.

currently with this revelation a great judgment was effected, not in the natural but in the spiritual world, which is the proper place of judgment, since there alone can the inward and essential affections which constitute the spiritual nature of man be disclosed, and his final lot be determined in accordance with them. The new heaven and earth which were to be created have nothing to do with the physical universe, which is perfectly adapted to the uses for which it is designed, and will never be destroyed. They foreshadow a new internal and external state of the human mind, the internal of man being his heaven and the external his earth.

It is inevitable that statements such as these should be staggering to those who meet with them for the first time. It is right that they should be weighed with scrupulous care, but not that they should be rejected without examination because they do not accord with our preconceptions; for we can easily see that any new revelation would be certain to come into conflict with many of the ideas which Christian people had entertained owing to that relatively imperfect knowledge of God and His purposes and ways which its object would be to enlarge. To refuse to consider them on the assumption that there cannot be, and consequently never will be, any further revelation, is little less irrational than to reject all revelation on the ground that there is no God from whom it could come.

The first thought excited in the minds of most people by Swedenborg's interpretation of the meaning of the second Advent is that it explains it away altogether. A visible, personal appearance seems so real, a spiritual appearance so misty and intangible. But is not this clearly a mistake? Physical vision of any human being of itself reveals to us nothing of his true nature. If we are

able to pierce through the veil of physical phenomena with which that inner man is invested, and discern something of their meaning, we do so by a faculty finer than bodily sight; some sympathetic appreciation, some intuition, for which we cannot account on logical grounds, and which, nevertheless, we feel is nobler and more truly human than our sensations, and even than our logical reason. Does any one really *come* to us *mentally* by the mere presentation of his person before our bodily eyes? We may be as remote from any comprehension of his character and motives, which are his real self, as if he were at the other side of the globe. No one is made known to another except by a knowledge of the truth about him. Without this, his mere physical presence is meaningless or delusive. How can God be truly present, or *presented*, to any mind except by means of truths about Him which will enable it to apprehend something of His nature and purposes? Unless the mind is thus enlightened, although He is always present in it, and that in fullness, He is as if absent; for it can form only erroneous ideas about Him, if it does not ignore His existence altogether. Is it not clear that we are conjoined to or separated from our fellow-men by the ideas we form about them? Must it not be the same with our relation to God? If our ideas about Him are false, how is it possible that He should be effectively and truly present in our conscious thought?

The Lord's first Advent, so far as it was the means of leading men to strive after a new life, was necessarily a revelation of Divine truths unknown, or lost, before, and was, therefore, essentially a spiritual coming. It was also a work of redemption, by a judgment effected in the spiritual world, and the restoration of the heavens and the hells to order, and by the glorification of His

Humanity. This work He finished for all men, for all time, altogether independently of any co-operation on their part. But this deliverance did not of itself ensure the salvation of a single soul. It only restored spiritual freedom to man, and thereby the ability to work out his own salvation if he would. The only new condition which rendered intelligent co-operation on his part more attainable than it had been before was, that the Lord made known during His life on earth a number of Divine truths, presented in forms adapted to the comprehension of the simple good of that time. Nothing can possibly guide the conscious efforts of man except truth that is in some measure seen and understood. No one can try to do anything unless he knows what he ought to try for, and how he ought to try; and unless this knowledge be true it will inevitably lead him astray. This simple kind of truth the Lord taught not only by His words and works but by His life. Mankind had fallen so far away from any true knowledge of God, that they could only be taught it like children, through their senses, by a vivid, living picture of the truth. Divine Truth itself was embodied in a perfect human life, and thus rendered accessible to simple minds in a way that never could have been effected by mere doctrinal instruction. "Truth embodied in a tale could enter in at lowly doors."

The truths revealed by the Lord at His first Advent were, that God is our Father in the heavens; that He is unchangeable love; that He Himself is the manifestation of that Father, through whom alone the Father can be approached; that religion consists in willing obedience to the Divine Commandments, and an active and unselfish regard for the good of others; that man survives death and will be judged according to his works.

These truths have often been forgotten, often obscured, often perverted; but they have remained ineffaceable in the Word, and by them the Lord has always *come* to His Church ever since its inauguration, so far as it was willing to receive Him.

There ought, therefore, to be little antecedent difficulty in believing that a new revelation enabling men to *see* God intellectually in His Word and in His works, with a clearness never possible before, should constitute the second coming of the Lord.

We now turn to Swedenborg's teaching about what he calls the *Old,* or First, Christian Church and its supersession by a new one. The almost insuperable objection which arises in the minds of devout Christians is that this implies some disparagement of that Church, the foundations of which the Lord Himself laid during His life on earth, and an arrogant claim on Swedenborg's part to be the founder of a new and superior Church. These ideas are, however, based on a complete misconception. In order to remove it, we must remember that the essential *Church,* in Swedenborg's usage of the term, is constituted by a genuine love of goodness and truth for their own sakes, and by the spiritual relation thus established in the minds of men with the Lord, from whom all good and all truth come. This relation is necessarily imperceptible while men are still living in this world, because we see only their actions, but cannot discern the motives by which they are actuated and by which the existence or the non-existence of the Church in them is determined. The true Church on earth is, therefore, invisible; but so far as it *is* a true Church, it never can pass away. It is as indestructible as the Lord Himself, on whom it depends and who perpetually sustains it on earth and in heaven. But this does not

exclude the possibility of the disclosure by the Lord of further truths, called for by new conditions in the world of human thought, and needed to enable the Church to reach truer conceptions of Himself and His Providence, and consequently a higher level of spiritual life than would be otherwise attainable. He Himself said, "I have many things yet to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12). Nor does it exclude the possibility that the men composing the visible Church may so pervert the truths committed to their charge as to become incapable of performing that essential function in the economy of the spiritual world for the sake of which the Church exists, and render necessary the institution of a new Church which can perform that function. "The kingdom shall be taken from you," said the Lord to the Jews, "and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

The true, spiritual Church of the Lord is indestructible; but as embodied in men upon earth a Church may pass away, and that from two causes. One is the abandonment by it of the life or practice of religion for mere doctrine. When charity or the life of religion perishes, the Church inevitably perishes too, for the Church has no other use than to initiate and develop the life of charity in men. This apostasy from charity always involves in the end a total perversion of doctrine; for the affections are the sole perceptive powers of the mind, and when they are perverted, as must happen when the life of religion is neglected, truths are inevitably falsified. This falsification, when it has wholly infected the Church, must needs be remedied, for there is no salvation for man through falsity.

Another cause which may render the institution of a new Church necessary is, that the body of doctrine com-

mitted to its charge and on which it is founded, has become inadequate or unsuited to the altered spiritual needs of mankind, and consequently to the practical possibilities of their spiritual advancement. These two causes have always operated together in bringing about the consummation and supersession of former Churches.

The assertion, therefore, that a new Church has been instituted, involves no disparagement of the former Church, so far as it was really the Lord's. It does involve a reflection on the men composing the institution called the Church at the time of the Judgment which Swedenborg declared he witnessed, and for many hundreds of years before; for the golden age of the Christian Church ended about the time of the Council of Nice, when the doctrine of the tri-personality of the Godhead was promulgated, thus vitiating at its very source the idea on which all religious truth must be based, that God is one. An inconceivable dogma being thus placed at the very fountain-head of Christian thought, other dogmas to which reason could not assent were propagated from it; for as certainly as one lie produces another to support it, so certainly does a false conception of the Deity beget a brood of subordinate falsities as its spiritual offspring. Religion became a matter of belief, or rather of profession of belief, and of observances no more spiritual in their character than were the rituals of the Jews. The shunning of evils as sins against God was declared to have no essential part in the work of regeneration. Men calling themselves Christians plunged into the grossest evils without restraint; and the love of dominion for the sake of self invaded the high places of the Church which claimed to have been founded by the meek and lowly Jesus. The state of this

Church, spiritually regarded, in Swedenborg's time, is a question of fact, on which it would be idle to pretend that we can pronounce in the exercise of our own judgment; but I suppose there are few who will contest the assertion that in the middle of the eighteenth century the life of religion had fallen to so low an ebb in the Christian world, that, unless a great change for the better had taken place, Christianity, as a regenerative power in humanity, must have perished.

It is, moreover, a total misconception of Swedenborg's attitude towards his own teaching to imagine that he claimed to be the founder of the new Church which he announced. He constantly and solemnly repudiated any such pretension; not in express terms, for the idea would to him have been so abhorrent that it probably never entered his mind. The repudiation is contained in his repeated statements that the New Church would be the Lord's Church and was instituted by Him alone. Swedenborg was merely the human instrument through whom the truths on which alone it could be founded were communicated to the world.

Everything of real spiritual value remaining in the former Church is incorporated in the new; and these remains are always great, even when a Church is consummated, especially among the simple good, who, too humble and too diffident of their own powers to reject the false doctrine of their Church, are, nevertheless, not in a life according to that doctrine. There is, however, a real supersession of the Old Church in this respect, that the spiritual function which it has become incapable of performing is, for that reason, transferred to a new Church, capable of performing it. This function is, to be the channel through which Divine influences from the Lord are conveyed to all mankind by means of the

Word. It takes place on the plane of the World of Spirits and is the work of the Lord alone.

The new truths given for the purpose of establishing a new Church are never new facts, but new knowledge about facts which have existed unrecognised before. Even the rites and enactments on which the Jewish ceremonial religion was based were taken in large measure from the traditions of the Ancient Church, which were diffused throughout a great part of the eastern world. They were only consolidated, purified and established under Divine sanction on a basis of pure correspondences, for the sake of the spiritual uses to mankind which that Church, or representation of a Church, was designed to serve. The Lord did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil in His own person all the Divine truths which were representatively embodied in them, and to enable all His true followers to do the same, in their measure. So the new Church is not to be regarded as a supersession of the old, but rather as a restoration of its lost truths, their amplification by the disclosure of many truths unknown before, and the consolidation of the whole into a system of doctrine capable of carrying rational conviction to the mind of any one who will study it with a sincere desire to discover the truth ; will take the pains necessary to enable him to understand it, and is willing to regulate his life by the truths he learns.

Every Church is necessarily founded on doctrine, because the affections of man, which are his essential self, can only be reached through his understanding ; and its character is determined by the nature of the truths of which its doctrine consists, and the kind of obedience which is rendered to them by the people among whom it is instituted. We must not think of " doctrine " as

restricted to the verbal statement of propositions arranged in logical order. Doctrine is simply "teaching," or "instruction," and is evidently an indispensable preliminary to belief. The very aim of the Church's existence as an institution is to induce belief in truths, or facts, which are not extant before the bodily eyes of men, but which it is much more important that they should believe than any natural facts whatever; because these of themselves can only enable them to lead a rational life in the world, whereas the others will prepare them for an eternal life of unselfish usefulness in heaven, if they embody the truths they learn in their lives. Doctrine, therefore, as it exists in human minds, passes through three phases, knowledge, belief, and faith; knowledge is indispensable to belief, and belief to faith; but if doctrine is only knowledge, or only belief, it remains barren, and will sooner or later be forgotten, or discarded. Only as the truth is persistently applied to the direction of a man's life does it become united with his affections, and thus ineradicably implanted in his very self. In short, whatever principles a man adopts from conviction, and uses to regulate his daily life, constitute *his* doctrine, whether he calls them so or not. We may, therefore, have a doctrine of hell as well as a heavenly doctrine, and the doctrine of hell will lead a man to hell, unless he changes his mind and repents, just as certainly as heavenly doctrines will lead him to heaven, if he is faithful to the truths he believes.

Each Church or Dispensation which has existed after the Most Ancient Church perished until the manifestation of God in the flesh was established on a basis of doctrine *less* pure and elevated than that of the Church which preceded it. In the Most Ancient or Adamic Church the affections were supreme and supplied

directly to the understanding all the faculty of perceiving truth it needed, so that it grasped them intuitively, as soon as they were presented. This was the source of *their* doctrine. They derived it directly from nature, which to them was an open book, full of Divine significance, and from frequent intercourse with the inhabitants of the spiritual world, which was open to them. When the will became corrupted in the descendants of the men of that Church, their understanding necessarily became corrupt too; for as certainly as good affections lead to truth, so certainly do evil affections lead to falsity; and there was then no faculty in man by which the aberrations of the will could be curbed and corrected, because his thought was the immediate offspring of his affections. This Church was succeeded by the Ancient or Noetic Church, in which truth was first presented in the form of written statements, in order that with them the process of transition from knowledge to belief, and thence to life, might take place, and thus conscience be established in them; or, in other words, that through their understanding a new will might be formed in them. When this Church in its turn fell and was consummated, the Israelitish Church was instituted, the doctrine of which consisted merely of rules for external conduct, whether in obeying moral laws or observing rituals. The doctrine on which the Christian Church was founded consisted in the unfolding of some of the inner meanings of the Mosaic institutions, though no complete explanation of the relation of the new to the old was then given, and the disclosure of the truth that religion consists in obedience to the Divine commandments, not in act only, but in motive and thought.

Now, if the teaching of Swedenborg is true; if it enables us to attain a clear conception of the Trinity in

God, without impairing our conception of the Divine Unity; if it enables us to have definite and consistent beliefs about the future life and the relation of our present life to it; if it is able to convince us that we possess in the Word a Divine revelation which is perfect in every detail; and if every truth of the Word is so explained and placed in such coherent connection with other truths, that it not only shines by its own intrinsic light, but sheds light on every other—in this case, it must surely be obvious to every one who believes in the Church as an institution established among men for the dissemination of Divine truth, that this doctrine not only *may*, but *must* be the basis of a new Church; new in spirit and essence, if not in external form.

All rests on the question whether the new doctrines are *true*. If they are, then Swedenborg's explanation of the way he became possessed of them is the only tenable one, and the conclusion becomes irresistible that these disclosures were made for the very purpose of inaugurating a new Church. It is unwise, therefore, to allow our minds to be diverted from the question whether they are true, which we can, perhaps, settle to our satisfaction, by our repugnance to the idea of a new Church, which may be no more reasonable than that which makes it difficult for any one to abandon or modify beliefs which he has once embraced.

CHAPTER XXIX

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

It was stated in the last chapter that Swedenborg disclaimed having any part in the establishment of a new Christian Church, other than that of the divinely commissioned and illuminated servant of the Lord, through whom the truths necessary for the accomplishment of that purpose were revealed. But these truths were not made known to him by being poured, as it were, directly into his mind from within. The capacity of every mind to receive enlightenment from the Divine depends, he tells us, on the quantity and quality of the knowledge of Divine things which that mind possesses; and he himself was no exception to this law. He would not have been capable of receiving the revelation which he was the means of conveying to mankind unless he had pursued those laborious scientific and philosophical investigations to which he devoted the first fifty-six years of his life; for one of the basic truths which he had to proclaim was the correspondence of natural and spiritual things, not only in general but in the least particulars; and this could not have been rationally disclosed to him without that knowledge of the natural world which his scientific and philosophical studies procured for him. When his intromission into conscious intercourse with the spiritual world took place, it was necessary for him to study Hebrew, in order that he might be able to read the Old Testament Scriptures in the original language, in which alone perfect correspon-

dence and representation and, consequently, plenary inspiration is to be found. It was also necessary for him to make a detailed and reiterated study of the whole Word from Genesis to Revelation, comparing passage with passage and word with word, in order that he might be able to discern the laws according to which the various symbols used in Scripture are employed. All these labours were indispensable, but they did not in themselves constitute his qualification for the work he had to do. What, then, did ? Let him answer in his own words :

> That the Lord manifested Himself before me, His servant, and sent me on this work, and that He afterwards opened the sight of my spirit, and has granted me to behold the heavens and the hells, and this now uninterruptedly for many years, I testify in truth ; also, that from the first day of that call I have not received anything that pertains to the doctrine of the New Church from any angel, but from the Lord alone, while I read the Word. (*The True Christian Religion*, § 779 ; published in 1770.)
>
> I have conversed with spirits and angels now for many years ; but no spirit has dared, and no angel wished to instruct me about anything in the Word ; but the Lord alone has taught me, who has been revealed to me, and has enlightened me. (*Divine Providence ;* published in 1764.)
>
> It has been given me to see the light of heaven, and from it to perceive distinctly what has come from the Lord and what from the angels. What has come from the Lord has been written, and what has come from the angels has not been written. (*Apocalypse Explained*, written in 1759.)

Other passages of like import with these might be cited, but would scarcely add to their significance. They suffice to establish the fact that Swedenborg regarded himself as the recipient of a Divine revelation. Obviously this ought not to be regarded as a *claim* on his part, but as a repudiation of the idea that the truths of this revelation had been obtained by his own ability, industry, or peculiar psychic experiences. This disclaimer he was bound in probity to make, if he believed it to be true. To withhold it would have been treachery to the cause which was entrusted to him, and to his fellow-men for whose use the message was sent.

But this claim, or disclaimer, cannot and should not induce any thoughtful man to accept his disclosures on this ground alone; for somewhat similar claims have been made by other religious teachers of unquestionable integrity and spiritual insight, whose doctrines differ in many respects from those of Swedenborg. We should, indeed, be unfaithful to his teaching, were we to do so; for though he plainly presents the doctrines contained in the whole of his theological works as a connected series of divinely revealed *facts*, he does not ask us to accept them blindly on this ground. A blind faith is a mere lip-profession, which counts for little or nothing in the development of man's spiritual powers, for it leaves his reason and consequently his affections untouched.

The *Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning Faith* commences thus:

FAITH IS AN INTERNAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRUTH

At the present day[1] the term Faith is taken to mean the mere thought that a thing is so because

[1] A.D. 1763.

the Church so teaches, and because it is not evident to the understanding. For we are told to believe and not to doubt; and if we say that we do not comprehend, we are told that this is just the reason for believing. So that the faith of the present day is a faith in the unknown, and may be called a blind faith; and as it is a declaration of one person transmitted to another, it is a traditional faith.

Real faith is nothing but an acknowledgment of a thing because it is true; for one who is in real faith thinks and says, "This is true, and therefore I believe it." If he does not see the truth of anything, he says, "I do not know whether this is true, and therefore, as yet, I do not believe it. How can I believe what I do not comprehend? It may, for aught I know, be false."

As the angels are in the affection of understanding truth they repudiate the dogma that the understanding must be passively submissive to faith, and say, "What does it mean, to believe a thing without seeing whether it is true?" and if any one tells them it ought nevertheless to be believed, they reply, "Do you think yourself the Deity, that I am bound to believe you? or do you think me mad enough to believe a statement of which I do not see the truth?" Whereupon the dogmatiser betakes himself elsewhere. The wisdom of the angels consists solely in this, that they see and comprehend everything that they think (1, 2, 4).

It must not be supposed, however, that Swedenborg regards scepticism as justifiable, or as a habit of mind that will, of itself, lead to anything but total unbelief.

Scepticism, as a necessary, orderly, and useful faculty is simply reflection, consideration; it is the faculty by which we exercise judgment, and may be protected from forming or retaining irrational and inconsistent beliefs. It therefore involves criticism, which means discerning and deciding between two or more ideas, or systems of ideas, which are presented to the mind. In modern usage scepticism has come to mean a habit of mind which disposes it to regard every statement about the great indemonstrables of human life with suspicion; and criticism a faculty for picking holes in things. These abuses and perversions of scepticism and criticism lead to nothing but negation in matters of religion.

There are two attitudes in which we may approach the study of religious truth; one Swedenborg calls an affirmative principle, the other a negative principle. The negative principle consists in "denying everything of the kind, as when a man says in his heart that he cannot believe such things until he is convinced of their truth by what he can comprehend or be sensible of." The other principle is "to affirm the things pertaining to doctrine derived from the Word, as when a man thinks and believes within himself that they are true *because the Lord has said so*" (*A.C.* 2568), and in another place he says, "With the man of the Church the first of all principles is *to believe the Word*" (*A.C.* 9222).

Unhappily, in the present day the negative principle is so prevalent in the world of religious thought, that it is scarcely possible for any one to help falling under its influence, more or less. To many people it is very difficult "to believe the Word" simply on the ground that it is the Word of the Lord; for they do not see any convincing reason for believing that it *is* wholly and solely

the very Word of God, or pure Divine truth; and obviously so long and so far as any one is possessed by the idea that it is merely the product of human opinion and aspiration, he will never devote that humble and prayerful study to its pages which is necessary to convince him that it is anything else. Yet even such a man may be convinced, if he is willing to be convinced, and to adopt the means necessary to convince him.

To put the matter in another way, every man approaches the study of religious truth in an attitude of mind compounded, in infinitely various proportions in different people, of two states or tendencies, one antagonistic and the other favourable. No one is ever wholly dominated by either the one or the other. However whole-heartedly he may have adopted one of them, so long as he remains in this world he is never completely freed from the influence of the other. Sceptical misgivings will from time to time assail the mind that is in an affirmative state. On the other side,

> Obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings,
> Blank misgivings of a creature
> Moving about in worlds not realised,

will visit the mind that is in a negative state and shake its sense of security; but finally the one or the other will prevail. The resolutely negative class of mind is represented by the bitterly hostile infidel. Whenever any religious truth is presented, he is instantly up in arms, and points every mental weapon in his armoury against it that he may destroy it. A man belonging to the other class wants to find truth in religion. He feels that without religion, or, in other words, without God, he would be living in a world of inexpressible and

irremediable sadness. When he meets with statements which he does not understand, or the truth of which he cannot at the moment see, he does not deny their truth, for he is conscious how little we can know even about the natural world which is extant around us and open to scientific investigation. How much less can we expect to know from our own natural intelligence of that unseen world which religion postulates! What folly it must be, therefore, to deny the existence of things merely because we do not see their truth. We do not permit ourselves to form such irrational judgments about natural things which we do not understand. When, for instance, Sir Oliver Lodge tells us that the density of the ether, calculated in various ways, always comes out at about "a thousand tons to the cubic millimeter,"[1] most people who are not expert mathematicians and physicists probably feel that the statement is unintelligible to them, and barely credible; but they do not presume to *deny* it on that account. A man can only be justified in denying a religious or ethical doctrine on one of two grounds, its intrinsic irrationality, or its inconsistency with some religious or ethical belief which he holds already. The latter ground of rejection is justifiable, even though the man may be dominated by an erroneous belief, or mistaken in supposing that the doctrine he denies is inconsistent with the essential element of truth which his own belief contains. He ought not, indeed, to surrender his belief until he sees that it is erroneous, or that everything it contains of real value is incorporated in some higher presentation of truth which has now become intelligible and consequently credible to him.

It has been stated in a former chapter that affection

[1] *Ether of Space*, p. 90.

is the predominant factor in the apprehension of religious truth. This does not mean, as the sceptic is fond of alleging, that a man believes a thing because he would like it to be true; but that if a man wants to find religious truth, not as a mere intellectual satisfaction, but as a guide to the conduct of his daily life, he is in the right way to find it, and will ultimately find it in such measure as will suffice for his own needs, if he perseveres in his quest in the only efficacious way, first, by endeavouring to live faithfully according to the truths he does see, and secondly by patient search for more truth. A man never discovers any natural truth, even, unless he wants to discover it; for affection is the motive power of thought. On the contrary, if a man does not want to believe any of the great indemonstrables of human thought he can always find plenty of reasons for disbelieving them. "There are none so blind," the proverb says, "as those who do not want to see."

Our affections are, therefore, the decisive factors in the judgments we form about religious truth. Have we any criterion by which we may determine which attitude of mind, the affirmative or the negative, is the right one? *Ought* a man to be neutral, indifferent, in face of such a problem as the existence or non-existence of God, and the possibility of our acquiring any knowledge of His purposes with regard to us? What a hard heart that must be which feels indifferent as to whether there is some Divine end developing through all the sufferings and perplexities of human life! Must not every mind that believes in moral good and evil desire that the one should receive the support and the other the condemnation of the only sanction that can raise choice between them above the level of considerations of personal preference or social utility?

Our religious convictions are necessarily personal to ourselves. They result, so far as they are based on an intellectual operation, from a wide induction from all the facts of life which are open to our observation; in other words, they are opinions, the truth of which we cannot demonstrate to any one else. But why should this disconcert or discourage us? It should, indeed, make us gentle in our judgment of others whose opinions may differ from our own, and the processes of whose thought we are as unable to follow as they are to follow ours. It should make us modest in the estimate we may form of the completeness of the system of truth which has become established in our own minds, and hopeful that it may be amplified and perfected indefinitely. But it ought not to induce us to relinquish the quest of religious truth as useless, or to think that it does not matter what our religious opinions are. Mr. Rudyard Kipling has spoken of "the craven fear of being great." There is a "craven fear" which is doing infinitely more harm in the present day, the fear of thinking wrongly in religious matters. Of course we shall make mistakes in our search for religious truth; but the greatest mistake of all is to give up the search. The search for religious truth consists largely, like the pursuit of scientific truth, in the correction of errors. If life were a sum in arithmetic we need make no mistakes, but then it would not be a human life at all. It is human because it takes account of values so inestimable that they can never be exhaustively conceived by any finite mind. Affirm, then; make sure that your affirmation is of the highest truth you can grasp, and then affirm boldly, sure that whatever correction your thought may need will come from affirmation, ratified by conduct, not from negation, which is impotence. Never mind about the

things you cannot see or comprehend. They can, at the moment, form no element in your immediate duty; but do not suppose they are untrue or unworthy of belief because for the moment you cannot see or understand them.

CHAPTER XXX

EVIDENCE

No reader of this volume will have followed it to this point without feeling some interest in the teaching which it is its object to expound. But it is likely enough that some thoughts of the following kind may have passed through his mind. " All this is very interesting, and, in some degree, intelligible. Granting a few fundamental assumptions, which no one can absolutely deny to be possible, and even reasonable, the whole system seems to work out quite consistently and logically. But where is the proof of it all? How can proof be conceivably attained? At every crucial point the author buttresses his statements with, '*Swedenborg says*'—this or that; and seems to think that this is decisive. The good man is apparently trying to substitute an infallible teacher for the infallible Church of the Roman Catholics and the infallible Bible of the old Protestantism. All very well when you have come to your 'infallibility' conviction; but how is one to reach it?"

There is a good deal of truth in the observations which I have thrown into the form of a supposed soliloquy, but the comparison is defective in one important point. Neither the Roman Catholic nor the Protestant Churches have ever pretended to convince people of the truth of their doctrines by reasons. On the contrary, their teaching was, and, in large measure, still is, that reason is out of court in judging matters relating to faith. These must be accepted as the declara-

tion of truth by God Himself, as expressed in the decisions of His divinely authorised and commissioned Church, or in the Bible. After they have been accepted as true on one or other of these grounds, their reasonableness may be in some measure discerned. Swedenborg's position, on the contrary, is that spiritual things can be understood as easily as natural things, provided the essential facts be known and admitted. This knowledge had not been granted to mankind prior to the revelation made through him, and without it an intellectual conviction of the truth of his teaching is unattainable. For, as has been stated in a former chapter, the enlightenment which every man receives, or may receive, from the Lord depends on the quality and quantity of the knowledge he possesses; and this knowledge has to be acquired by his own exertions.

It is difficult for those who are only acquainted with Swedenborg's works at second hand to conceive the extent to which his personality retires, as it were, into the background, as one becomes convinced that his teaching is true. At first it looms large. The questions, "Was his experience real? Was it veridical? Was it coloured by his own preconceptions?" and others centring in the personality of Swedenborg, occupy the thoughts of the student, if he is of a cautious or sceptical turn of mind. But as he advances in the rational acceptance of Swedenborg's teaching they subside. The name of Swedenborg becomes a concise designation for that system of truth which he was the means of communicating to the world. It is to this, and not to the utterance of the man, that he appeals, when he uses the words, "Swedenborg says." To imagine that the confidence of those who accept Swedenborg's doctrine is based on his personal qualifications as a religious teacher, is, to use a

homely phrase, "putting the cart before the horse." Rather do they believe in the authority of his teaching because they have become convinced that it is true; and are, consequently, able, and, indeed, compelled, to accept without reserve his own account of how he came by the truths he taught.

This, however, is not likely to satisfy our imaginary critic. "Tell me, then," he will naturally say, "how you reached this conviction, and how I may do so too." The request is a fair one, and I will do my best to comply with it. But remember that it is much more easy to form convictions, even firm convictions, convictions on the truth of which we would stake our existence, than to justify them to another mind. Take the case of a friend in whom we have implicit confidence. How are we to justify that confidence to another person who may choose to question its validity? He can point out how often such confidence has been misplaced, and how easily conceivable it is that we may be deceived. The proper antidote to the universal distrust which would be generated by the adoption of such an attitude of mind as this, is, "I know that I may be wrong, because I am fallible. But it is better for me, and for all men, that their confidence should sometimes prove to be misplaced than that they should never trust any one."

The same argument is valid in favour of religion. All that is noble and truly human in life depends on indemonstrable beliefs. The rejection of them would reduce the world to a spiritual wilderness. It is because these over-beliefs are so great, so inexhaustible in their scope and implications, that they are indemonstrable. A sum in arithmetic or a proposition in Euclid is demonstrable, and there its significance ends. But the truths of religion reach up to the Infinite, and all we can attain is a pro-

gressive demonstration to our minds of their truth; an ever-growing conviction that, however imperfect our knowledge and perception may be, we have got a firm grip of the essential facts of life, which will suffice to guide us through its many difficulties and perplexities to an assured end.

As this assurance is developed independently in each mind that attains it, and never in exactly the same way in any two minds, it is impossible to define the process in a way which will be applicable to every case. Yet the general nature of the evidence may be outlined; the main elements of proof are as follows:

1. Documentary certainty.
2. The coherence of all the parts of the system.
3. The degree in which it reduces apparently unrelated or discordant facts under a general principle.
4. The self-evidence of its component parts.
5. The knowledge of ourselves it enables us to attain.
6. The certitude we may have that the life it prescribes is good.
7. Its simplicity.
8. Its universality, or catholicity.

Let us consider these elements of proof in the above order.

1. Documentary Certainty

By this I mean that the historical facts involved in the problem are unquestionable. Swedenborg lived; a man undoubtedly of the highest ability, probity, and, if his alleged intercourse with the spiritual world was not an exception, sobriety of judgment; a statesman, scientist, and philosopher who was regarded with respect

and veneration by all his contemporaries who knew him, except a few of the Swedish clergy who bitterly opposed his doctrines and tried to shut him up in a mad-house. The works published by him anonymously and otherwise were written by him and so were those he left in MS. and which have been published since his death. These works, so far as they relate to his intercourse with the spiritual world, are a true record of his experiences; for the idea that he was a conscious impostor is incredible, and, so far as I am aware, has never been maintained by any one. This documentary certainty is not in itself any proof of the truth of Swedenborg's teaching, but it greatly simplifies the problem which the student has first to encounter; for Swedenborg's experience of the spiritual world can only be accounted for on one of two theories; that he actually came into sensible contact with a world in which those who have passed away from this world still live, or that he was insane in this respect, that for the last twenty-eight years of his life he lived in constant intercourse with a world which to him seemed as real as this does to us, and which was nevertheless entirely imaginary. If the existence of a spiritual world such as he describes be admitted, there is no further serious intellectual difficulty in his teaching, except that of adjusting all our ideas to this new and illuminating conception, in the light of which all the facts of life will require reinterpretation and all its values revision.

2. The Coherence of all the Parts of the System

I cannot do better, I think, than preface what I have to say about this with a few sentences from an article by Professor Sir Henry Jones which appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* for January 1906.

> The most significant of all the discoveries of modern epistemology is that an idea is an idea, and a judgment is true or false, in virtue of their relation to a *system* of ideas or judgments; that their certainty rests not in themselves, but in the system of knowledge of which they are a part, that their certainty grows as the system of knowledge expands. . . . The strength of the whole body of an organised system of ideas, such as a science, or a philosophic or theological doctrine, belongs to every element in it; to deny the element is to discredit the principle to which it is related; and to discredit the principle of the system is to demand the reinterpretation of every part of it. Knowledge, in fact, is in this respect analogous to the cosmos of reality which it is meant to represent: it is held up by itself; it is the equipoise of its own constituents.

To put the substance of this quotation in another and, perhaps, a simpler way, Professor Jones maintains that no isolated truth can be said to be wholly true. Its truth depends on the series of truths in which it stands, and to which it is organically related. This work has been written to little purpose if it has not exhibited the striking coherence and mutual interdependence of the parts of the system of doctrine taught by Swedenborg. They are, in fact, so coherent that it will be found difficult to accept any part without accepting all. The whole system depends on one postulate, the existence of a Divinely Human God, who is Infinite Love and Wisdom, and who works by means to accomplish ends. If this postulate be accepted, all the subordinate doctrines flow easily and naturally from it.

3. The Degree in which it reduces apparently unrelated or discordant Facts under a General Principle

The late Sir G. H. Darwin said, in his presidential address at the meeting of the British Association at Cape Town in 1905 :

> The proof of a scientific theory lies in the number of facts which it groups into a connected whole.

This proof is all the more cogent if the facts thus grouped had before seemed discordant. The idea that angels and men are beings of a different order has always been a crux to Christian thought. The fact made known to Swedenborg by experience and confirmed by the Word, that all angels and spirits have been born as men on this or some other planet, makes the purpose of creation divinely simple. A large portion of the Bible consists of records of " visions " which for the majority of Christian people are unintelligible. In the light of Swedenborg's teaching they can be understood as easily as any other part of Scripture. His teaching also enables us to understand as no other doctrine has done why evil is permitted to exist ; that hell itself is a provision of the Divine mercy, and that it is organised on exactly the same principle as heaven ; for each denizen of the spiritual world, be he good or evil, is finally allotted a place as near to the Divine as he can endure to remain in. A closer proximity would be torment, or, at least, acute and constant distress both to the one and the other. Every one goes to his own place, marked out for him with unerring precision by the Divine Providence, on the basis of the ruling love which is his very Self.

4. The Self-evidence of its Component Parts

All Swedenborg's doctrines rest on facts, or assumptions, if you prefer to call them so, which tend more and more to become self-evident. It was said by Lord Tennyson, that "nothing worth proving can be proved"; in other words, all great, fundamental truths are self-evident; not at first, but always increasingly so, if a man is not content with merely *thinking* about them but persistently tries to *live* them. We are all aware of this in a general way. We can see that the existence of God, the difference between right and wrong, duty with regard to them, and the existence of free-will, must be self-evident if they are evident at all. We do not, I think, sufficiently realise how far this self-evidence can extend. It may, I believe—this is certainly Swedenborg's teaching—extend to every spiritual fact that comes within the range of man's thought.

5. The Knowledge of Ourselves it enables us to attain

I suppose that every thoughtful man is conscious that in this world of mystery he himself is as great a mystery as any; and this all the more if he has made a religious life his aim. "Why am I torn by conflicting impulses? Why do I so often see and approve the better part and choose the worse? Why do I seem to myself at one moment near to heaven and the next plunged into hell? Is there any purpose in this ceaseless conflict and turmoil which I find in myself?" In reality all the mysteries of the world around him are concentrated in his own bosom, and he will never be able to interpret them till he has learnt to understand himself, and thus become aware

that he is a microcosmic image and representation of the macrocosm of which he is an infinitesimal part. If you want to understand yourself, study Swedenborg. He will open up to you the secret recesses of your own nature, with a vividness and sureness of touch which no other writer has ever approached. It is a painful process, but salutary; for our almost ineradicable tendency to approve of ourselves, to shut our eyes to our faults, to magnify our supposed virtues, and to deem our own unaided reason the final arbiter of truth, is the most formidable obstacle to true religion, and the last to be completely overcome.

6. The Certitude We may have that the Life it prescribes is Good

It is happily much more easy to see what is good than what is true, though, ultimately, both will be found to be inseparable. Multitudes of people deny truths; few deny the existence of good. But the nature of the life of religion has been only indistinctly apprehended in the Christian world. On the practical side, not to break the commandments in their literal sense, to go to church regularly, to pay attention to one's private devotions, to contribute to charitable objects; on the emotional side, to have a vivid and ecstatic sense of the Divine presence—these and things like these have constituted the life of religion as commonly conceived. How simple and obvious is Swedenborg's identification of the religious life with a life of usefulness led from a love of use, and his prescription that the *only* way to attain a genuine love of use for its own sake is to shun evils as sins against God! "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and what can cleanse this fount of human

thought and action but the eradication of the evil and selfish affections from which all bad actions spring? Even if a man has to confess "I do not believe in God. How then can I shun evils as sins against Him?" he may still feel that here he has full assurance of being essentially in the right. He can see that though there is much inexplicable suffering in the world, by far the greatest and worst of the miseries that afflict mankind are the result of the inhumanity of man to man. If he wants to leave the world a little better than he found it, how can he do it more surely than by endeavouring to subdue in himself those propensities which lead him to injure others and to degrade himself, because they are wrong? Here is an impregnable fortress. It may not place the sanctions of religion on the highest basis; but it affords to even the doubting mind an inexpugnable certitude. And, in the fluctuations of thought and feeling which attend us on our spiritual journey, we sometimes need a refuge to which we can flee and feel that we are perfectly safe, when everything else seems doubtful.

7. Its Simplicity

Swedenborg's teaching is both simple and complex. It is simple because its object is to lay down a rule of life which shall be equally available for the simple and the wise, the ignorant and the learned. It cannot but be complex because it involves an account of the universe, seen and unseen, as an organic whole, and thus of the production of the visible out of the invisible. But the profound things it contains, and which may tax the powers of the most acute mind, are stated with the sole purpose of bringing us with full assurance to the performance of the simplest duties, which are the same for

all men, and are summed up in the injunction that we are to shun evils as sins against God, and do good because it is from Him. The basic ideas which underlie all Swedenborg's teaching are just those which children and simple-minded good people form spontaneously, even without being taught them. Children think of God as a kind Man who lives in heaven. This idea is fundamentally true. It never needs to be rejected, but only to be elevated, developed and purified as their intelligence grows. Every child knows what it is to be "good" and to be "naughty." These ideas, too, are fundamentally right, and only need amplification and correction. Ideas of this kind pervade all religions, and are the saving element in them all, so far as they are made matters of life and not merely of belief; for they make it possible that a genuine conscience should be formed in man, and this is the only qualification needed for his admission to some heaven, congenial to his state and genius, whatever doctrinal errors may have obscured his vision, through no fault of his own, during his life on earth.

8. Its Catholicity

The universality or catholicity of Swedenborg's teaching is an essential link in the chain of spiritual evidence; because the central conceptions on which the whole system is based—a Divinely Human God, who is Infinite Love and Wisdom, who possesses all power, and who works by means in which man's free-will has an indispensable part to play, to secure one end, the formation of a vast and ever-growing heaven of angels, drawn from the races of men born upon some earth in the universe—necessarily involve the corollary that no man is left out of this scheme; every one without

exception must be provided with the means necessary to enable him to prepare himself for a life in heaven after death.

Swedenborg's theological teaching presents itself under two aspects which are apt to seem incongruous. On the one hand, it gives the most positive, comprehensive, and detailed exposition of the doctrines of Christianity ever communicated to the world, not as his own opinions, but as a connected series of Divinely revealed facts. In this sphere of spiritual truth there is no room for the vagaries of human opinion; and obviously, if there be such a thing as Divine Truth, it must be as exact and unalterable as the facts of nature. We may believe it or disbelieve it, but the facts remain the same. On the other hand, he recognises the inevitableness of differences of opinion on such subjects, and even their value in developing distinct types of character, all of which have their own specific use in the economy of the spiritual world. He even says that the varieties of spiritual faculty needed for the perfection of the heavens could not be derived from men of only one religion (*D. P.* 326). From the former point of view, Swedenborg's exposition of Christian doctrine is the most exclusive that has ever been promulgated; from the latter, it is the most comprehensive, the most tolerant of human error, the most sympathetic for sincere, though mistaken effort, the most humane. This inclusive side of Swedenborg's teaching is as essential as the exclusive one, and we shall never understand either aright without the other.

The inclusiveness rests upon the manifest fact that though the Divine Truth itself which sustains both the supermundane and the mundane order must be in every detail as exact and unchangeable as the laws of nature

which correspond to it and represent it in this world, a man can have no basis for his belief about it but his own conviction. But nothing is more common than the experience that evidence which carries conviction to one mind fails to carry it to another. The devout Mohammedan is as firmly convinced that the Koran contains the supreme Divine revelation as the Christian is that the Bible does. What can he or any one do, but obey that which *seems to him* to be true? No religion can claim to be universal unless it allows for this fundamental and unalterable fact; and Swedenborg, as I understand his teaching, represents Christianity as the universal religion, which, in the other world, when everything in man which is merely of circumstance has been stripped off, and he stands revealed in his essential Self, will embrace in its ample fold every man who has sincerely endeavoured to rule his life by the principles which he believed to be true, although in large measure they might not be so. For every one who so lives acquires a love of truth and good for their own sakes—and not for anything which he can get from them in this world or the next—which enables him to assimilate easily the instruction which is provided for all in the other life who are willing and able—able because willing—to receive it.

In order to see how easily the exclusive and inclusive aspects of Swedenborg's teaching are reconcilable, we have only to bear in mind a few fundamental facts.

1. The sole object of religion is to create, develop and sustain the life of charity, or the unselfish love of good, in man.
2. The only way in which this can be done is by inducing him to shun evils as sins against God, as if by a power inherent in himself.

3. He can only be led to do this by an appeal to his reason; for the essential faculty that has to be set in motion is his will, and this can only be reached and act through his understanding.
4. The appeal to his reason must be adapted to his actual state, constituted by his own specific genius, or the fundamental nature conferred upon him by creation, modified by circumstances such as heredity, nationality, locality and education. If it were not so adapted it would not be effective. The absolute best will seldom, or, perhaps we may say, never be the relative best, or the best for *him*. That will be the relative best which is best adapted to set him to work in his actual state at shunning his evils as sins against God. This work if once commenced and maintained is always efficacious, because the mind which is destined to live consciously in heaven is the creation of the Lord alone, and is constructed, not on the basis of his thoughts or actions, but of his motives and ends, which are his essential Self. "Every one," therefore, "is permitted to believe truths *as he apprehends them*; otherwise there would be no reception because there would be no acknowledgment."

The Lord's kingdom consists of nothing but ends and uses; and therefore the angels who are associated with a man only look to his ends and uses, nor do they extract anything else from his thought; the other things, which relate to ideas and material objects, they care nothing about, for they are far beneath their sphere. (*Arcana Cœl.*, 1645.)

It would be a great mistake to infer from this that it

does not much matter what we believe while we are in this world, provided our belief be sincere. It is a matter of unspeakable importance that our beliefs should be not only sincere but true, for they are our only guides to conduct, in that wide sense which is covered by Swedenborg's use of the term "life." The truths we learn in childhood may suffice for childish needs, but they will not suffice when adolescence comes, with its own special needs and dangers. Nor will truths then acquired be adequate for our guidance through the perplexing problems of mature age. Without a steady growth of truth in our minds the development of our spiritual powers will be stunted, and we shall be but too apt to lose hold even of the truths we once possessed; not, perhaps, by consciously rejecting them, but by letting them lapse into mere beliefs, with no vital relation to the duties of every day. Thus the life of religion, which is religion itself, languishes or perishes.

These considerations bear on our own success in surmounting the ever-changing difficulties and dangers which beset us during the journey of life. There are others of a higher kind which relate to the development in each of us of that specific function which he is capable of performing in the economy of the spiritual world. Every human being is a microcosm of potential uses, which will be highly developed, or remain undeveloped, in proportion to the energy or indolence he displays in the pursuit of truth and the application of it to the regulation of his life; or will be perverted into their opposites in the degree that the falsities which are the intellectual associates and companions of his evils become deeply rooted in his affections. The nurture into actuality of these latent capacities of use to man, and so for the service of God, depends on the awakening of his

higher affections. These can only be aroused by suitable truths, for there is no way of access to the affections except through the understanding. If the higher truths are not seen these affections will remain dormant. Every human being is unique ; unlike any other that has ever existed or will ever exist. He has, therefore, latent in him, abilities for service different from those of every other being. Though they will exist in their plenitude in a range of mind of which, during his life on earth, he is unconscious, and where the Lord alone works, that inner mind can be developed only in accordance with his own efforts in the sphere of the natural mind which is committed to his charge. Neglect to cultivate that mind by the acquisition of fresh stores of the truths of life robs God of a power for good which He can exercise in exactly the same way through no other channel. It is the essence of sin against Him.

In the light of these truths it is not difficult to reconcile two statements which may seem, at first sight, to be at variance, " The Church exists from doctrine, for such as the doctrine is, such is the Church ; " and, " Doctrine itself does not constitute the external, still less the internal of the Church, nor does it make a distinction between Churches in the sight of the Lord, but a life according to doctrinals, all of which, if true, regard charity as their fundamental."

There are statements in Swedenborg's works as to the fatal consequences to a man's spiritual state of holding false beliefs, which appear inconsistent with those made in the early part of this chapter, and seem shocking if we believe, as no one who looks at the facts of life with an unprejudiced eye can fail to do, and as he himself teaches, that very erroneous religious opinions are often held by thoroughly sincere men, who have been taught from

childhood to believe them, or have adopted them in later life because they thought them true. For instance, he says that tri-personalists, Socinians, and believers in salvation by faith alone, cannot enter heaven. But this only means that those in the other life, who, when all that is adventitious and the result of circumstance in their minds has been cast off, and thought has become the immediate offspring of their affections, cannot think of God except as three distinct Persons, or cannot conceive of a Divine Humanity, are excluded from heaven, where every angel has his place allotted according to the ideas he forms of the Divine. Such persons are incapable of thinking truly about God, and consequently cannot, in reality, think of Him at all. The mere belief that faith is the only means of salvation does little harm, unless it leads a man to ignore the Divine commands, because, as he conceives, his motives and actions will in no way conduce to or hinder his salvation. If he does this the falsity becomes indelible. But this irremovable confirmation of falsity comes only from the unrestrained intrusion of self-love, and self-intelligence begotten of self-love, into the domain of religion ; never from mere mistaken ideas of truth innocently held.

> Falsities which are not from evil are, indeed, falsities in the external form, but not in the internal ; for there are falsities with those who are in the good of life, but in these there is interiorly good, which takes away the evil of falsity ; so that this kind of falsity does not seem to the angels like falsity, but like a kind of truth ; for the angels see the interior and not the exterior things of faith. (*Arcana Cœlestia,* 10648.)

It is evil that is opposed to heaven, but not falsity

from ignorance; indeed, if in the ignorance there is somewhat of innocence, then that falsity is accepted by the Lord as if it were truth; for those who are in such a state receive the truth [in the other life, if not in this]. (*A. C.* 6784.)

There are many circumstances which render it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for men to throw off, while still living in this world, the erroneous beliefs in which they have been brought up.

Every one is born into the religion of his country or of his parents, is initiated into it from infancy and afterwards retains it; nor can he extricate himself from its falsities, both on account of worldly business, and from weakness of understanding in investigating truths of that kind. (*True Christian Religion,* 254.)

A man ought not, indeed, to relinquish the religious beliefs which were instilled into him in childhood, or which he has embraced afterwards, until he sees clearly that they are erroneous and something better has come within his reach.

Whatever has been a matter of faith with any one, although not true, ought not to be rejected except after full consideration; otherwise the germ of his spiritual life is destroyed; and therefore the Lord never breaks such truth in a man, but as far as possible bends it. (*A. C.* 9039.)

Erroneous beliefs do little harm if they are held in simplicity and sincerity, and are not deeply rooted in the mind by reasoning.

What any one may have believed does not injure him in the other life, if only he have rightly held

charity towards the neighbour, according to its essentials; for people of this description have led a life of good, and have inwardly possessed truth agreeing with their good. Wherefore, when they are left to their own good, they freely and with joy acknowledge truths. (*Spiritual Diary*, 4654.)

All things are judged according to ends in the other life. If any one were to convert the whole world to Christianity and his end be self-glory, self-love, and the like, then he would obtain no reward for it in the other life, because the end was not the glory of the Lord, or the salvation of the human race; and, on the contrary, if any one should persecute and overthrow Christianity, and nevertheless from an innocent end, because he thought it right to do so, then he would be rewarded. (*S. D.* 2451.)

In fact, no one possesses perfectly pure truth, free from any tincture of human infirmity and error.

> As regards truth purified from all falsity it should be known that there can never be pure truth with man, because falsity is continually flowing in from the evil in which he is, and because truths are closely connected with each other; and, therefore, if there is one falsity among them, and especially if there are many, the remaining truths themselves are defiled and acquire somewhat of falsity. But truth is said to be purified from falsity when a man is capable of being kept by the Lord in the good of innocence. Innocence consists in acknowledging that in one's self there is nothing but evil, and that all good is from the Lord. (*A. C.* 7902.)

We are warned, therefore, against the tendency to form unfavourable conclusions about the spiritual state

of others who hold opinions which we deem false and heretical.

> There are two things that unite the members of the Church, life and doctrine. When the life conjoins them doctrine does not separate them; but if only doctrine unites them, as is the case with the Church to-day, then they separate one from another and form as many Churches as there are doctrines, although doctrine is for life and life is from doctrine. That they separate if only doctrine unites them is evident from this, that he who embraces one doctrine condemns another [who thinks differently] sometimes to hell; and that doctrine does not separate if life unites is evident from this, that he who is in goodness of life does not condemn another who thinks differently, but leaves it to his faith and conscience, and this even in the case of those outside the Church; for he says in his heart that none can be condemned for ignorance if they live in innocence and mutual love; like infants, for instance, who are also in ignorance when they die. (*A. C.* 4468.)

In the Christian world doctrinal beliefs separate the Churches, and so they call themselves Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, or Reformed, besides other names, which would never have happened if love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour had been made the chief element in faith. Then such things would be regarded only as differences of opinion concerning the mysteries of faith, which true Christians would leave to every one's conscience, and would say in their heart that he is a true Christian who lives as a Christian, that is, as the Lord teaches. Thus one Church would be

formed out of all the separate Churches, and all disagreements arising from doctrinal beliefs only would vanish; yea, all animosities of one against another would be put to flight in a moment, and the kingdom of the Lord be established on earth. (*A. C.* 1799.)

The truly unifying principle of the Church is not similarity of doctrine, but the love of good or use. If the cultivation of this had been regarded as the essential aim and function of the Church, not only would the inevitable differences of doctrinal belief have been greatly diminished, but those which remained would have lost all their acerbity, and would not have produced schisms.

> If the truth were accepted as a principle that love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour are the things on which the whole law rests and of which all the prophets speak, and thus that they are the essentials of all doctrine and worship, then the mind would be enlightened by innumerable things in the Word which otherwise lie hidden in the obscurity of a false principle; yea, then heresies would vanish, and out of many Churches there would be formed one Church, however they might differ as to doctrinals and rituals either flowing from or leading to these essentials. In this case, too, every one would say of another, whatever his doctrine or external worship might be, "This is my brother. I see that he worships the Lord, and that he is a good man." (*A. C.* 2385.)

All who live faithfully according to the truths, or what they deem to be truths, enforced by their own religion are saved; for they so acquire the rudiment, at least, of a genuine conscience, which is the only condition

necessary to enable them to enter some heaven congenial to their nature and state.

> The truths of conscience are various according to every one's religion, and these, if they are not contrary to the goods of faith, the Lord is not willing to infringe, because the man is steeped in them, and considers them holy. The Lord never breaks any one, but bends him, as is evident from this, that in every denomination in the Church there are those who are endowed with conscience, and the Gentiles have something resembling conscience from their religion. (*A. C.* 2831.)
>
> All are saved who are in the good of life according to the doctrines of their religion, which they believed to be truths, although they were not; for falsity is not imputed to any one who lives well according to the doctrines of his religion, as it is not the fault of such an one if he does not know truths; for the good of life according to religion contains within itself the affection of knowing truths, which such persons also learn and receive when they come into the other life; for every affection remains with man after death, and every man, when he becomes a spirit, is his own affection. Consequently they then drink in the truths which they desire, and so receive them deeply into their hearts. (*Apocalypse Explained,* 453.)

The conception of the Church of God is thus immensely extended beyond the bounds by which it has commonly been supposed to be circumscribed. It includes all the good, that is, all who are striving after goodness to the best of their knowledge and ability, throughout the whole world.

All are members of the Church of the Lord who have lived in the good of charity according to their religious belief. (*H. H.* 328.)

[The societary order which exists in heaven] is on earth also; but the communities which constitute it are dispersed through the whole world and consist of those who are in love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbour; but those scattered communities have been gathered together by the Lord that they also may resemble one man, like the communities in heaven. These communities are not only within but outside the [Christian] Church and, regarded as a whole, are called the Church of the Lord spread abroad among and gathered from the good in the whole world, which is also called a communion. This communion, or this Church, is the Lord's kingdom on earth, conjoined to the Lord's kingdom in the heavens, and thus conjoined to the Lord Himself. (*A. C.* 7396.)

The sum of all this is, "that it is not so difficult as some believe to live the life which leads to heaven."

Who is unable to live a civil and moral life? For every one is initiated into it from childhood and is made acquainted with it by his life in the world. Every one also does lead such a life, whether he be evil or good; for does not every one wish to be reputed sincere and just? Almost all men practise sincerity and justice outwardly, so that they seem to be sincere and just in heart, or to act from real sincerity and justice. A spiritual man ought to live in like manner, and he can do this as easily as a natural man can; the only difference is that a spiritual man believes in the Divine Being, and acts sincerely

and justly, not merely out of regard for civil and moral laws, but also for Divine laws. When anything comes into a man's mind which he knows to be insincere and unjust and he feels inclined to give way to it, all he has to do is to reflect that it ought not to be done, because it is contrary to the Divine commandments. If he accustoms himself so to reflect, and thus acquires a settled bent of mind, he is then gradually conjoined with heaven; and then the higher regions of his mind are opened, and he detects whatever is insincere and unjust in himself; and so far as he detects these evils they may be shaken off; for no evil can be shaken off until it is recognised as such. (*Heaven and Hell,* 530 and 533.)

TO SHUN EVILS AS SINS IS THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ITSELF. (*Divine Providence,* 265.)

APPENDIX

THE statement that *Swedenborg's doctrine of creation is essentially a spiritual monism* would not be accepted by many, perhaps the majority, of the most competent students of his works, without considerable qualifications. It means that matter is a mental entity. The principal reasons for coming to this conclusion may be stated as follows :—

1. Swedenborg explicitly denies the *infinity* of space. This seems inevitably to involve the denial of its existence, and consequently of that of matter, as an extra-mental entity.

2. He repeatedly warns his readers that creation cannot be understood unless space and time are *removed from their thought*. If space existed, as it appears to us to exist, in a form external to and independent of mind, it could not be necessary to remove it from our thoughts about creation ; for, in that case, extra-mental space would have been created ; and to remove it from our thought would be to leave out of account an essential element in creation, and thus *not* to understand it.

3. We find in Swedenborg's works, though not in juxtaposition, the following statements :—

The Divine is not in space.
The Divine cannot traverse space.
The Divine is in all spaces apart from space.
The Divine is totally present everywhere ; therefore not in one place more than another.

It seems impossible to reconcile these statements

except on the supposition that space, and the objects which occupy space, even in the natural world, are mental creations.

This interpretation will, I apprehend, occasion little difficulty to one who has felt the force of the idealistic interpretation of natural phenomena. Still less should it cause any difficulty to those who accept Swedenborg's account of the constitution and laws of the spiritual world—which can only be described as a world of mind—and also believe that it is the proximate cause of the natural world. It would seem to follow of necessity from Swedenborg's two fundamental ontological doctrines, that the whole universe, spiritual and natural, is maintained in existence by a perpetual act of Divine creation; and that it is so created out of the very substance of God.

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